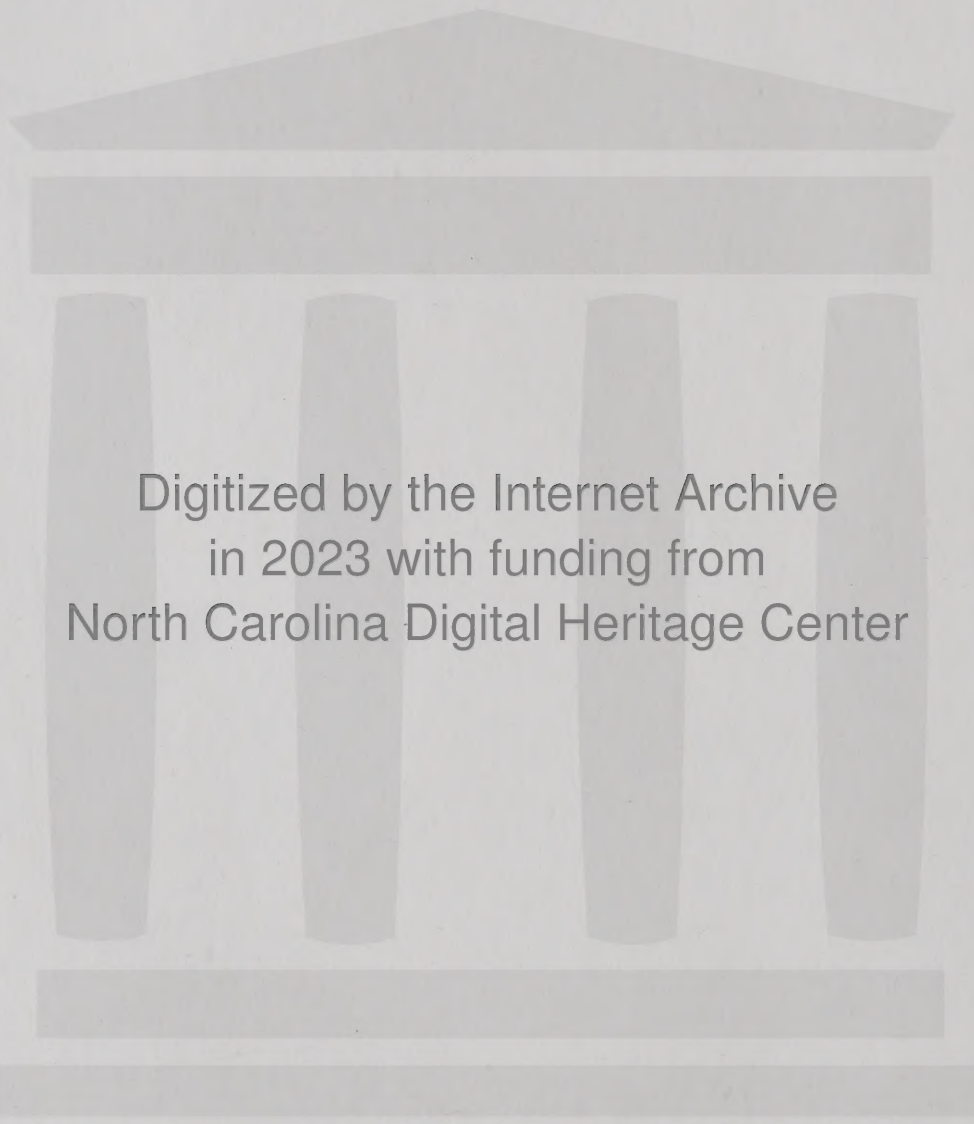


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The Journal of Rockingham County History and Genealogy



THE ROCKINGHAM COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

VOLUME XXXIII

2008 ISSUE

The Journal of Rockingham County History and Genealogy

The Journal is published annually by the Rockingham County Historical Society, Inc., Box 84, Wentworth, NC 27375. Members of the society, for which the annual dues are \$20.00 for an individual and \$25.00 for a family membership, receive the Journal. Beginning with the June 1997 issue of the Journal, individual copies may be purchased for \$6.00 per number plus \$2.00 mailing charge. A price list of back issues and other publications is available upon request.

Editorial Policy

The publication committee is interested in receiving articles on the history and genealogical source materials of Rockingham County and the adjacent area. The historical articles must be well written and thoroughly documented. Genealogical articles should consist of previously unpublished primary source materials pertaining to Rockingham County, such as abstracts of local records and edited diaries, letters or church records. Papers on family history should not be submitted. All copy, including footnotes, should be typed, double-spaced. Articles and correspondence should be sent to the Editor: Robert W. Carter, Jr., 1141 Irvin Farm Road, Reidsville, NC 27320.

About The Cover

The Rockingham County Courthouse in Wentworth was erected in 1907 to replace the old building that burned in October 1906. The wings on each side of the structure were added in 1938-1939. The trial of Junior Edd Thompson took place in the old court room in this building in November 1947. A new Judicial Center is presently under construction one mile east of the old courthouse.

Courtesy of Historical Collections Room,
Rockingham Community College,
Wentworth, North Carolina

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A Murder Before Eden

Alison Pratt, Ph.D.

"LEAKSVILLE, Aug. 25. Tom Pratt, 82 [sic], died in Leaksville Hospital tonight from a fractured skull and other injuries he received when bludgeoned early this morning by an unidentified man who broke into the Pratt home near here.

Rockingham County Sheriff Munsey S. Hodges said several suspects are being sought and that he expects to make an arrest 'very soon.'

The sheriff said feeling in the Leaksville area was running high.

The intruder broke into the house through a window, the sheriff said, and apparently attacked Pratt when the old man awakened."ⁱ

When 81-year-old Tom Pratt was attacked in his home (and later died) on August 25, 1947, it looked like a simple case of breaking and entering in which the victim intercepted the burglar and was killed in the process. Tom's young wife, Ruby Pratt, 36, claimed to have witnessed the attack on her husband and the search was on for a "large, heavy-set Negro with long wavy hair."ⁱⁱ

The story was the center of gossip, speculation, and some fear in quiet Rockingham County. Newspaper articles in the county's weekly newspapersⁱⁱⁱ as well as the Greensboro Daily News followed the case. By today's standard, everything happened quickly: the murder, the capture of a suspect, and the trial took less than six weeks. Now, more than 60 years later, these events have been forgotten to all save those with personal stakes in the story. Yet a closer look at this case reveals that some extraordinary events and people converged around this "ordinary" murder. In fact, this sequence of events made history, although no one seemed to have considered their implications at the time. And

despite its appearance as open-and-shut case when Sheriff Hodges arrested 17-year old Junior Thompson, the case was never solved.

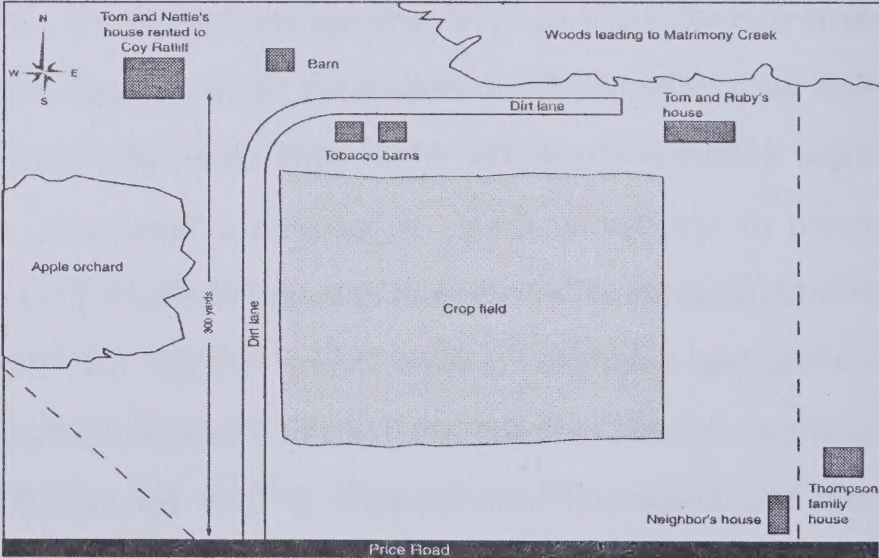
Tom Pratt

Tom Pratt^{iv} married Nettie Morgan^v on January 3, 1887, when they were both 20 years old. Seven children followed: Thomas (commonly known as Jake), Pearl, Alma, Clyde, Jim, Betty, and Reid.^{vi} Tom and Nettie moved to the town of Leaksville around 1910 while the children were young, affording them the opportunity to go to school and have local recreation.^{vii, viii} Tom worked as a craftsman with D.E. (Drury) Moore, specializing in fine carpentry such as ornate scrollwork found in fireplaces, doors, staircases, and gingerbread ornamentation on houses. Still, he was frequently in debt. In 1906, Tom and Nettie had mortgaged his entire tobacco crop, corn, fodder, shucks and his red cow to borrow \$15.40 from the Leaksville Mercantile Company, which he later repaid.^{ix}

When they were both 64 years old, Tom and Nettie decided to sell their house in town and return to farming. They found the perfect spot about three miles west of Leaksville on Price Road, in the El Bethel area, named for the El Bethel Presbyterian Church. The eighty-seven acre spread was adjacent to a branch of Matrimony Creek. It featured a farmhouse, a dug well, an apple orchard, plus room for crops and animals. The land, previously leased to tenant farmers, had belonged to Allen Denny "Dump" Ivie, the illustrious Leaksville attorney, who had died in 1927. His son, Allan Denny Ivie, Jr., (1907-1987)^x sold them the house and farm on June 2, 1930 for \$3,500.^{xi, xii} Tom and Nettie immediately sold a quarter of it to their granddaughter Edna Hoover and her husband, Harold, leaving them with about 64 acres.^{xiii}



Tom and Nettie Pratt with their children and grandchildren, about 1922, in front of the house at 109 Johnson Street, Leaksville (now Eden). Back row: Dan B. Holland, Dan Holland, Pearl Pratt Holland, Fannie Sue Cox Pratt (wife of Clyde), Clyde Milton Pratt, holding daughter Frances, Evie Collins Pratt (wife of Jim), holding daughter Hovis, James (Jim) Pratt. Front row: Edna Holland, Robert Reid Pratt, William Thomas Pratt ("Old Pa"), Peck Holland, Nettie Morgan Pratt ("Old Mammie"), Betty Hyler Pratt, Josie Smith Pratt (wife Thomas B.), Thomas B. ("Jake") Pratt. Tom and Nettie's second child, Alma, died at age 16 in 1908.



Not to Scale **The Tom Pratt Farm** 3 miles west of Leaksville



Photo used with permission from Colleen Shropshire.
Tom Pratt ("Old Pa") and his granddaughter
Colleen Pratt (daughter of Reid and Custis Pratt),
taken about 1940.

Tom and his now-grown sons cleared overgrown land with axes, mattocks, and dynamite to blast out tree stumps, using mules for the hauling. He built a barn for his livestock, a corncrib, two tobacco barns, and packhouses for the tobacco crop. He built a sawmill, cut down pines, and sold the lumber and stove wood to the textile mill— which then sold it cheap to their millworkers.^{xiv} He raised tobacco, corn, rye, apples and had a large vegetable garden for their own use and for selling. He sold eggs, melons, and vegetables to neighbors. His main crop was tobacco, which he sold at the yearly auction.^{xv} Though they were never entirely financially secure, the land allowed them to be totally self-sufficient and provided an income in the days before Social Security. The fact that Tom was able to accomplish this, largely on his own without any modern tools, equipment, or trucks, was a testament to his vigor and strength even in his mid- to late-60s.

Nettie was his helpmate. She milked cows, churned and made butter, helped with the vegetable garden and chickens, canned food for the winter, drew water from the well, prepared all the meals, washed all the dishes and clothes, made vinegar from the apple cider, kept the house clean, mended clothes, made quilts, and performed all the other traditional roles expected of a farm wife of the first half of the 20th century. Their work was hard, but the Pratts made a living and then rested on Sundays, when the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren would come visit.

So it was for their first five years on the farm. Then on a cold, rainy day in 1935, Nettie, then 69 years old, fell from the porch, broke her hip, and lay in the rain for hours before being found by her grandson-in-law, Harold Hoover.^{xvi} A diabetic, she never really recovered. Nettie died of pneumonia on March 26, 1936.

After 49 years of marriage, one assumes that Tom was lonely after Nettie's death. And without her assistance on the farm, he had lost his business

partner. Tom decided to build a small bungalow on his property in which to live and rent the large farmhouse to tenant farmers. Coy and Vera Ratliff rented the larger house and Tom moved into the small house about 100 yards east down a lane.

At some point after Nettie's death, Tom began courting a neighbor, Ruby Edwards, who was 45 years his junior. It is unknown exactly how they met. Perhaps she had offered to cook or clean for him for some extra money, or as a neighborly gesture. At any rate, Tom fell in love with her. "Papa's lost his mind," Jake Pratt had said about his father's determination to marry, feeling that the two of them would have nothing in common due to the 45-year age difference. Jake's brothers and sisters all agreed that it was a bad idea. Ruby was younger, in fact, than Tom's youngest child.^{xvii} Nevertheless, seven years after Nettie's death, in 1943, Tom, then 77, married 32-year old Ruby Edwards, who worked at the Fieldcrest bedspread mill and remained at her job after marrying. Jake and his siblings let the matter drop after the marriage, and Jake conceded, "She keeps a clean house."

A search of marriage records in the Rockingham County Courthouse found that while Tom and Ruby applied for a marriage license on June 5, 1943, the license was returned unused on August 4, 1943 (See Figure 1.)^{xviii} One can only speculate why. Were Tom's children the catalysts? Was Tom too busy with the farm? Were Tom and Ruby arguing? Who returned the certificate? Regardless, even though they returned one marriage license, by the end of that year they were married. There is no evidence that the children ever knew the actual circumstances; in fact, some Pratt family members believed that the marriage was "faked" by Ruby to trick Tom. Once the marriage took place, the children accepted it and let the matter drop. The Sunday afternoon visits with family shifted to his daughter Pearl Holland's house and Ruby did not attend.

Sixty years after the fact, the truth of the marriage came to light: Tom

and Ruby married in Martinsville, Virginia, on December 13, 1943.^{xix} On both marriage licenses (the one that was returned from Rockingham County, North Carolina, and the one from Henry County, Virginia), Ruby listed her last name as "Edwards" and her marital status as "divorced." Apparently she had resumed using her maiden name. Tom would have known that she was married before.

Even though Tom had been determined to marry Ruby over the protests of his children, all indications are that the marriage was unhappy. Tom would frequently appear at Pearl's home after an argument with Ruby. Sometimes he would return home after calming down; other times he would spend the night at his daughter's. He always went home, eventually. Family rumors about their arguments naturally favored Tom. It was rumored that Ruby had unsavory friends and hosted "wild" parties that included alcohol.^{xx} However, as divorce would have been intolerable to Tom, if not to Ruby, the two remained together for about five years. She never left her job at the mill, which benefited both of them, and he continued to grow tobacco as his main crop.^{xxi}

Then, on the hot summer night of August 25, 1947, Tom was assaulted in his home around 1:30 a.m. The attacker had hit him with a blunt object that caused extensive bleeding into the brain. Ruby testified that the noise woke her up from her upstairs bedroom. As she came down the steps that led directly into a small room where Tom slept, she said she saw a man in the process of beating her husband. Terrified, she ran back up the steps to her room. But as the attacker saw her, he ran out the front door. She then called to the nearest neighbors, the Ratliffs, for help, and eventually an ambulance was summoned (there was no telephone on the farm.) Tom was taken to Leaksville Hospital, where he died around 6:30 p.m. that same day. Because the death had occurred within 24 hours of the assault, the criminal charge would be first-degree burglary and first-degree murder.^{xxii}

"The sheriff said that entrance to the Pratt home about three miles out on the Price road, was made about 1:30 a.m. Monday,

apparently by a would-be burglar, who placed a old churn underneath a window, raised the screen, and crawled inside.

Mr. Pratt was sleeping in a downstairs hallway, with a string running from the light switch to the head of his bed. Apparently Sheriff Hodges said, Mr. Pratt heard the intruder, snapped on the light, and recognized him.

Mrs. Pratt, who was sleeping upstairs, heard the commotion as the intruder attacked Mr. Pratt, beating him about the head with some blunt object—'probably a rock,' the sheriff said. She turned on a light and went part of the way down the stairs, when she saw someone jump into the shadows, then come toward the stairs where she was standing. She ran up the steps and the intruder fled out the front door."^{xxiii}

On the night of the attack, Ruby's cries for help were answered first by her closest neighbors, Coy and Vera Ratliff, the tenant farmers on Tom's property. Coy Ratliff quickly alerted Harold Hoover, who came to the house with his wife Edna (Tom's granddaughter), and their son "Wink" [Winifred], who was then a teenager. Ruby gave her first description of the attacker. "He was as big as you are, Mr. Hoover!" Wink observed that his father, at 5'10" tall and 248 pounds, was a large man indeed. Ruby described the attacker as a "large, yellow-skinned Negro"^{xxiv} with long, slicked-back hair. Harold left Wink with Ruby while he went to call an ambulance and alert Tom's children of the attack.

Wink, left with a shotgun for protection should the intruder return, remembered Ruby wanting to show him the upended butter churn under the kitchen window that the intruder used to get into the house. He remembers her asking if he wanted to go outside to see it. "No ma'am, I'm not going out there," was Wink's reply. Because thick woods surrounded the house, Wink believed that the attacker could have been close by. Looking into the narrow kitchen, he saw that the hickory stick used to brace the oven door shut, propped between the oven and the wall, was still in place. It would be hard for a large man not to knock over that stick, thought Wink, let alone get in the window from climbing

on a churn. But he took Ruby at her word.^{xxv}

Dressed in his long underwear and a blue work shirt, covered with blood and his eye swollen shut, Tom was drifting in and out of consciousness. Harold returned with the ambulance to take Tom to the hospital. As Tom was being loaded into the ambulance, he blurted out, "Harold! Where y'all carryin' me to?" "You've been hurt, Mr. Pratt. We've got to take you to the hospital. Who did this to you?" At that, Tom just closed his eyes and turned away. Harold Hoover always felt that Tom could have named his attacker, as he had known Harold by name.^{xxvi} But that opportunity never came.

Meanwhile, word had gotten out about the attack on Tom Pratt. Deputy Sheriff Curtis Land was the first of the police force to arrive. A score of men followed with their shotguns and rifles ready to scour the woods. Ruby repeated her description of the attacker to all present. Jake Pratt, who went over the contents of the house in the coming days, said nothing was missing from the home but his father's chop ax that was always kept on the porch for stove wood. But neither the culprit nor the 'ax was ever found.^{xxvii} Finally,

"Mrs. Pratt also told investigators, the sheriff stated, that she and her husband kept a watch dog which was generally vicious with strangers but that the dog created no disturbance during the attack and was no where to be found until he showed up last night about 9 o'clock."^{xxviii}

As the day unfolded, Ruby and members of Tom's family stayed near him at the hospital, although his condition deteriorated throughout the day as bleeding into the brain progressed. One of the last people to see him alive was his youngest granddaughter, Colleen, daughter of Reid and Custis. She recalls that her father kept asking him, "Who did this to you?" Tom responded with groans or "oh Lord!" Colleen's recollection is that when her father tried to question her grandfather, Ruby would create a distraction, such as fainting

into a chair. Colleen, about 10 years old at the time, got a sense of unease with what she observed from Ruby. Tom Pratt died at Leaksville Hospital around 6:30 p.m. on August 25, 1947.^{xxix}

The Investigation

"Bloodhounds Join Hunt for Rockingham Escapee
Prison Camps Supervisor Sends Animals in Charge
of Keeper

By W. C. Burton

REIDSVILLE, Sept. 2— Two bloodhounds have been sent to Rockingham County to aid in tracking down Junior Thompson, 17, Negro prison escapee, wanted in the murder of Tom Pratt, 82-year old [sic]¹ Leaksville white man, Sheriff M.S. Hodges said today.

Hodges had tried unsuccessfully all last week to borrow bloodhounds from state prison camps in Orange and Randolph Counties. The Rockingham County sheriff said the dogs were dispatched to this county Sunday in the charge of a keeper trained to help the animals trail their quarry.

Capt. J. M. Barnes, supervisor of prison camps in the Fifth District, sent the dogs to Rockingham as soon as he learned of the need for them here, Hodges said, and expressed regret that the local sheriff's department had not been successful in obtaining the animals earlier. Captain Barnes assured Sheriff Hodges that the dogs would be put up at State Prison Camp 509 near Wentworth and would be at the disposal of his department as long as there are needed, Hodges sated.

The Rockingham sheriff said there were no new developments in the Pratt murder case but that his deputies were still busy working with S. B. I. Agent R. A. Allen on the case. Pratt was bludgeoned to death in his home on the Price Road a week ago and Mrs. Pratt who surprised the assailant in the act of beating her husband, identified a picture of the fugitive, Thompson, as that of the attacker.^{xxx}

¹ Tom Pratt was 81.

On either August 26 or 27, Sheriff Hodges showed Ruby Pratt a photograph of 17-year old Junior Thompson.^{xxxii} Thompson, who lived with his family 300 yards or so from the Pratt residence, was 5' 8" tall and weighed 145 pounds. She identified him as the person who attacked her husband.

Rockingham County Sheriff Munsey Hodges had been sheriff for less than a year, having taken office on December 2, 1946. Elected as a reformer the previous November, he won the election against Republican candidate J. S. Wilson, Jr., by 1,984 votes of 8,220 votes cast. He was to attend the September meeting of the County Commissioners with a report of his first seven months in office.^{xxxiii} Now, with just a short time to go before presenting his report, this brutal murder had occurred that he had to solve. The Commissioners and a local businessman had each offered a \$100 reward for the arrest of the assailant.^{xxxiii} Clearly the community was taking this case very seriously.

Sheriff Hodges had called the State Bureau of Investigation and had been assigned Reidsville native Robert A. Allen^{xxxiv} to the case. But it took a week to obtain the bloodhounds he wanted, losing precious time while the alleged attacker escaped.



Junior Edd Thompson

Junior Edd Thompson lived with his father, Ed Thompson, Sr., his mother, Reeves, and his two brothers, Weldon and "Big Pete," on Price Road about 300 yards in front of Tom Pratt's property (see Figure 2, property map). In the family, Mr. Thompson and Junior looked alike: tall, wiry, dark-skinned and not weighing more than 150 pounds. Mrs. Thompson (Reeves) and the other two boys, Weldon and Big Pete, looked alike: heavy-set and light-skinned. According to people who

remembered them, there was no way you could mistake Junior for his brothers.^{xxxv}

Ed Thompson, Sr. worked at the Fieldcrest Textile Finishing Mill in the bedsheet finishing division. He was in charge of large equipment and machines that mixed starch in 300- to 500-gallon tanks to be pumped into machines for application to the fabric. Mr. Thompson would have had to read the formulas for mixing the starch and other ingredients and follow the various "recipes" that would be required for different fabrics. It was a responsible job due to the variety of materials involved. It would have been unusual for a black man to hold a job this good at the mill, indicating that Mr. Thompson was someone management people respected.^{xxxvi}

As his immediate neighbor, Mr. Thompson worked occasionally as a farm hand for Tom Pratt.^{xxxvii} Tom Pratt's grandchildren, cousins Hazel Estes and Wink Hoover, remember playing with Junior as they spent time at the house, picking apples in "Old Pa's" (as they called him) orchard or visiting on Sundays. There was no animosity across racial lines, and in fact, cooperation and perhaps friendship existed between the families. According to Carl Thompson, who was a distant cousin to Edd Thompson, "The people who lived on Price Road were both black and white. They were a close people."^{xxxviii}

Wanted now for the murder of Tom Pratt, Junior had been in trouble before. At about the age of 14, on January 11, 1945, he was arrested for robbing a house in the middle of the night, stealing a pistol and a box of cartridges. Sheriff Robert Barnes had made the arrest.^{xxxix} He was incarcerated for burglary at the Montgomery Correctional Center in Troy, N.C. Then, about two years into his term, in October, 1946, he escaped from a prison road gang. Apparently he just came home, and if the authorities really looked for him, they didn't look there. He would have been about 16 at the time of his escape. He was apparently home for about ten months when the Tom Pratt murder occurred,

on August 25, 1947. It's not known what he told his parents about his being home.

Bloodhounds Track Down Negro Wanted For Brutal Slaying of Thomas Pratt Alleged Slayer of Tom Pratt is Captured After Manhunt that Lasted Nine Days—Widow of Murdered Man Makes Positive Identification

"A nine-day manhunt came to an end at 4:30 o'clock last Wednesday afternoon when bloodhounds finally tracked down Junior Thompson, 17-year-old Negro, charged with the murder of Tom Pratt, 81-year old farmer, white, of near Leaksville, August 25.

The hungry and bedraggled fugitive was captured in a heavily wooded area two and a half miles southwest of Ridgeway, Va., little more than half an hour after a posse of officers from North Carolina and Virginia moved into the area where Thompson was hiding.

The officers suspected that Thompson was hiding in the home of James Penn, colored, about a half mile from Route 220. When they searched the Penn house they found nobody home but they found a blood-stained khaki coat and a blue sweater on a corner of the front porch. These garments fit the description of the ones Thompson was said to have been wearing.

The officers had brought two bloodhounds and the dogs were given the scent from the coat and sweater. The first dog took up Thompson's back track but the other dog got started on the trail Thompson had made when he left the house. The big bloodhound led off in a southerly direction, his nose to the ground, and straining at the leash of his handler. Suddenly the dog flanked by four officers, bounded through the edge of a cornfield and into a thicket, bordering a ravine and out of sight of the officers who had remained near the Penn house.

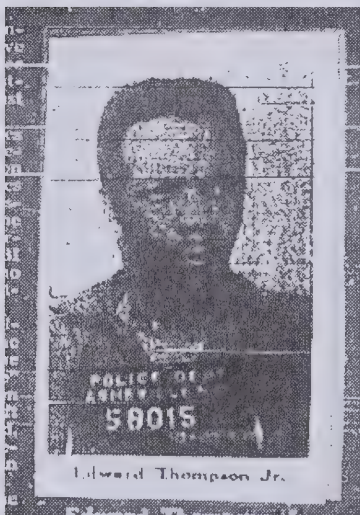
The officers who were following the dog saw Thompson get up off the ground where he had been hiding in a clump of bushes. He walked calmly to the officers and made no resistance. Robert A. Allen of the North Carolina

S. B. I. fired one shot but not at the Negro, only to let everyone know that the fugitive had been captured.

The slender Negro, who weighs 145 pounds and stands five feet eight inches, first told the officers that his name was James Price, Jr. and that he was on his way home from work in Martinsville. Later he admitted that his name was Junior Thompson, but denied that he knew anything about the murder of Tom Pratt.

Thompson was serving a term of four to seven years on the Rockingham County road gang when he escaped last October. After his capture last Wednesday he was taken to Martinsville where he waived extradition and was quietly taken to a North Carolina jail to await grand jury action on the killing of Mr. Pratt. The Rockingham county officers in the posse that finally made his capture were Chief Deputy B. J. Carter, Carl Axsom, Marshall Clark, A. J. Talbot and Charles C. Case.

Thompson has been identified by Mrs. Pratt as the man she saw in the Pratt home the night her husband was beaten to death."^{xi}



Edward Thompson's 1968 mug shot.



Junior Thompson's photo as it appeared in the newspapers in 1947.

On September 4, 1947, Ruby Pratt identified Junior Thompson in a police line-up at the Guilford County Courthouse jail in Greensboro, where Junior was being held. (It is not known why he was held in Greensboro and not Rockingham County.) According to newspaper accounts,^{xii} the line-up included

eight men who exchanged some items of clothing between identifications. Ruby was asked to identify the attacker four times. The investigators apparently took extra steps to ensure that the defense could not punch a hole in the identification process. Each time she identified Junior Thompson without hesitation.



Ruby Pratt with her dog Collie in an article that ran in both the Greensboro Daily News and the Leaksville News, a few weeks after the trial for the murder of her husband.

Ruby's Past

Jake and Clyde Pratt, Tom's two oldest sons, did not like the trend of this investigation. Junior had known the Pratt grandchildren, and they felt he had no motive to kill their father. They knew Mr. Thompson as a good man—would his son have done this? Everyone had heard Ruby describe the attacker as a very large, light-skinned black man with long hair, which did not resemble Junior. Junior had been Tom and Ruby's neighbor—why hadn't she recognized him on the night of the murder? What had happened to the dog

that disappeared that night and returned the next day? Some said the blood on Tom Pratt's wounds had dried, indicating that she had waited to get help. Others said her bed did not look like it had been slept in, contradicting her story that she'd been asleep when she heard a commotion. Jake and Clyde had thought their father had a will, but it was not found. And most of all, why would a 32-year old woman marry a 77-year old man? Jake, Clyde, and many others knew about the rumors of her parties and the fights between her and their father. Some said she had been married before. In short, Jake and Clyde did not

trust Ruby. No one knew the circumstances of their marriage. Had they been legally married, or had she tricked him into thinking so? As Ruby was now first in line to inherit their father's 64 acres, two houses, and whatever small estate he had, they decided to look into her background and petition to have her removed as executrix of the estate.

At some point that fall, Jake and Clyde retained James Merritt Sharp of Reidsville, who practiced law with his daughter Susie, to ask questions about the will, and to find out if their father had legally married Ruby.^{xlii}

When Jake, Clyde, and Jake's 21-year-old son Herbert^{xliii} arrived at the law office of Sharp and Sharp, they said a brief hello to "Miss Susie" (as she was known locally) before meeting with her father. Jim Sharp had some news for them. According to notes taken by Herbert Pratt, Mr. Sharp revealed the following information. He told them they had seven years to probate the will, should it ever be found. A will needn't be recorded at the courthouse if a judge deemed it valid. The court could appoint an executor, or the family could petition the court to become the executor, which is what Jake and Clyde did. Moreover, if it could be proven that a person had the will and had not produced it, the holder could be kept in jail for the rest of his or her natural life. This, however, would have been difficult to prove, as Jake and Clyde had not actually seen the will and had only assumed one existed. Their asking these questions, however, suggests they may have suspected Ruby was hiding or had destroyed the will.

The next matter was Ruby's marital history. Mr. Sharp revealed that Ruby had been married two previous times. She had married Carl Meeks on April 8, 1926, at the age of 16, and he sued for divorce on September 22, 1933, after seven years of marriage. Ruby then married Charlie Corum on November 4, 1933. Although it is not known for how long Ruby and Carl Meeks lived together as husband and wife, Meeks' lawsuit for divorce was entered only

about six weeks prior to her second marriage to Charlie Corum. Perhaps she had fallen in love with Mr. Corum while married and living with Mr. Meeks. Or perhaps Ruby and Carl Meeks had been separated for a long time and she had asked him to file so that she could remarry. This part of the story is lost. However, Mr. Sharp's investigation revealed another fact more relevant to Jake and Clyde. In September, 1939, after about six years of marriage, Charlie Corum filed for divorce. He instead was granted an annulment on grounds of bigamy. For reasons not known, Ruby's divorce from her first husband, Carl Meeks, was never finalized, so she was not legally married to Charlie Corum— nor was she legally married to Tom Pratt. At the time of Tom Pratt's death, she was still legally married to Carl Meeks. She was not Tom Pratt's widow after all, and not entitled to any of his estate.

The news of Ruby's prior marriages would have a profound impact on the events to follow. The stain of one divorce, let alone two, would have aroused suspicion about Ruby's character in a way that is difficult to understand today. "Good people" were expected to abide by fairly strict moral codes, and the codes were stricter for women than for men. Divorce, premarital sex, drinking alcohol, gambling, playing cards, swearing, taking the Lord's name in vain, and dancing indicated loose morals, and were frowned upon by many people, especially the church-going kind. Smoking in this tobacco economy was acceptable for men, but much less so for most women. Jake and Clyde would have taken a dim view of Ruby given the rumors they had heard, and these new facts from Mr. Sharp would have settled something in their minds: they saw no motive for Junior to have killed Tom Pratt, but saw plenty of motive for Ruby to have done so. Moreover, Ruby's description of the attacker did not describe Junior. They therefore made a momentous decision: to support Junior in the case against him.

Jake Pratt sent his son Herbert^{xliv} to the Fieldcrest sheet finishing mill to

find Mr. Thompson and tell him that the Pratt family was "standing behind" Junior. Jake and Clyde hired State Senator J. Hampton Price^{xlv} to defend Junior Thompson. Mr. Price was considered to be one of the best criminal attorneys in the state.^{xlvi} "You could shoot someone in the back and Hamp Price would declare you were innocent, and get a jury to think so, too."^{xlvii} Jake and Clyde's decision to pay for Junior's defense was significant and historic, given that they were living in rural North Carolina in 1947. Racial division gripped the entire country, not just the South. The issue loomed in the background of all events, from political (the denial of voting rights; segregation), to economic (denial of job opportunities to blacks, poor and segregated schools), to social (how people addressed one another, where and how people interacted). For example, the Greensboro Daily News ran a photo of 20-year old Iris Alexander with the caption, "Dated Negro." A Wisconsin college student, she had been evicted by her landlords for dating a "Negro" student.^{xlviii} In fact, antimiscegenation laws that made interracial marriage illegal were still on the books until 1967, when the Supreme Court overturned them. North Carolina was one of fifteen states that still had such laws on the books at that time. Most people just accepted it as "the way it was." In the Leaksville area, race relations were without heat—the Depression had served as a great equalizer, in that nearly everyone was poor. There was little or no Ku Klux Klan activity until some years later, when the civil rights movement gathered steam. However, lynchings were not unheard of, and if any black man had been found in the woods behind Tom Pratt's house on the night of the attack, vigilante "justice" might well have prevailed.^{xlix} On the other hand, Jake and Clyde had grown up living and working side-by-side with black men and boys on the farms, and they were friends. Jake and Clyde's willingness to defend a black person against murder charges was not because they were what we today call "liberals." These were men who followed a conservative moral code on all the matters of the day. They were patriotic,

politically conservative, and firm believers in the Protestant work ethic. They went to church, Bible classes and prayer meetings, and did not drink, swear, play cards or tell "dirty jokes." As such, their decision to defend Junior came from their religious convictions and from a profound sense of fairness and justice they believed should prevail regardless of race.

The same moral code that led them to support Junior Thompson would have also led them to suspect Ruby of wrongdoing. They had definite ideas of what was proper behavior for women and men, and her behavior was outside those bounds. While she was definitely inconsistent in her description of the attacker, one must assume that some prejudice against her came into play in their decision. Apparently, most of the community agreed with them.

As will be seen, Hampton Price did not hesitate to use the information uncovered by Mr. Sharp to cast aspersions on Ruby's character at the trial. The jury "understood" the same things that Jake and Clyde did: Ruby was not to be trusted.

Preliminary Hearing

A preliminary hearing was held on September 18, 1947, in the Recorder's Court in Spray, North Carolina. Dr. R. P. Harris testified that he had attended Tom Pratt on the night of the attack, described the wounds and said that death resulted from the injuries, which were made from a blunt object, "probably a rock." Ruby Pratt testified that she had seen Junior Thompson attack her husband. Judge Herman Peters presided over the hearing that attracted an overflowing crowd to the courtroom. In an article leading up to the hearing, The Leaksville News reported that stains on a coat found on the front porch of James Penn, where Junior had been hiding out when arrested, would be analyzed to see if they were blood and if so, whether they matched Tom Pratt's blood. This did not make the newspaper accounts of the trial, so the outcome is not known.¹

Jury Selection

Although women won the right to vote with the 19th amendment in 1920, allowing them to serve on juries was a state matter. While black men were technically granted that right by the Supreme Court in 1880 (*Strauder v. West Virginia*, 100 U.S. 303 (1880)), the right for women was not extended until *Taylor v. Louisiana* in 1975 (419 U.S. 522 (1975)), which denied states the right to exclude women from juries.^{li} In North Carolina, women were granted the right to serve in 1946. Women began serving on juries for lesser crimes that year. In Leaksville, Mrs. R. D. Pulliam had served on a jury that had found a man not guilty of public drunkenness.^{lii} But some people wondered whether women had the fortitude to deal with the grisly details of murder. In Guilford County, the court clerk was flooded with calls from women asking to be excused.^{liii}

William Haywood Bobbitt^{liv}, 47, served as the judge in the Thompson trial. The original jury pool contained the names of 24 potential jurors. Of these, five were women. Probably due to the widespread newspaper coverage of the case, Judge Bobbitt ordered a Special Venire to enlarge the jury pool, with an additional 75 jury summons being delivered by Sherriff Hodges' office. On Wednesday, October 29, 1947, potential jurors arrived from Mayo, Williamsburg, Stoneville, Reidsville, Leaksville, Spray, Draper, Wentworth, Simpsonville, Ruffin, and Madison. Of these, seventeen were women.

The jury lists reflect the culture of the times. Women were listed using their husbands' names, for example: "Mrs. Hunter Carter." The women's own given names were not recorded. Furthermore, the seven potential jurors who were African-American were denoted by "Col." after their names, meaning "colored." Racial identification was deeply ingrained in every aspect of life, and juries were no exception.^{lv}

The Order for Special Venire for the state of North Carolina against

Junior Edd Thompson states "...that 75 scrolls be drawn from Jury Box No. 1 by a child under ten years of age and the names so drawn shall constitute the special venire and the Clerk of this Court shall insert the names appearing on the scrolls so drawn..." That day, Douglas Taylor, five years old, who had been approved by the court, did indeed select the jury for this trial in the presence of Junior Thompson and his attorney. He was paid five dollars by the county commissioners of Rockingham County for his services.^{lvi} Douglas Taylor's father, Captain Taylor, was warden for the State Prison near Wentworth.

In the end, the jury was an all-white panel of ten men and two women, with a female alternate juror. They were: J. C. Thacker of Mayo; Mrs. W. L. Patterson of Williamsburg; C. L. Combs of Draper; Mrs. A. R. Williams of Wentworth; Russell Searce of Reidsville; J. F. Burgess of Draper; Bennie Williams of Williamsburg; Russell Draper of Wentworth; Walter Gillespie of Reidsville; H. J. Frye of Mayo; M. B. Newman of Draper; and Clyde Comer of Mayo. The alternate was Mrs. Marion Caudle of Mayo. Judge Bobbitt noted in a quote to the newspaper that, to his knowledge, this was the first capital case in North Carolina with women on the jury.^{lvii} The jury was sequestered at the Belvedere Hotel in Reidsville. The trial took place at the Rockingham County Courthouse in Wentworth.

The Reporter: W. C. Burton

The story of the Pratt murder and the trial of Junior Thompson could not be adequately told without the newspaper accounts that appeared at the time. One journalist in particular, William Clarence Burton, must be noted. His byline was W. C. Burton, but everyone knew him as "Mutt." He was 40 years old in 1947 and making his career at the Greensboro Daily News. Mutt Burton's reporting was the best resource for the details of the case, as, incredibly, trial transcripts were destroyed in those days if the trial ended in an acquittal. Other

local newspapers, including the Leaksville News, the Reidsville Review, and the Madison Messenger, were weekly papers that would have to summarize the events for that week's publications. The Greensboro Daily News, being a daily periodical, allowed space for more detail. Thanks to Mr. Burton, we got it.^{lviii}

The Trial

The trial was conducted on November 4, 5, and 6, 1947, less than ten weeks after the murder. The state solicitor was Ralph James Scott. A native of Stokes County, Mr. Scott was 42 years old. His education had started in a one-room, one-teacher schoolhouse and completed with a law degree in 1930 from Wake Forest College. He had worked his way through college by tobacco farming and washing dishes at the boarding house where he had lived. He became involved in the Stokes County Democratic Executive Committee in the 1930's, rising to chairman in 1937. He was elected solicitor of the 21st Judicial District in 1938 and had just won his re-election to the post for the third time in 1946. His role as solicitor covered Surry, Stokes, Rockingham, and Caswell counties.^{lix lx}

At the opposite table was 47-year old Senator J. Hampton Price, Junior Edd Thompson's defense attorney. Mr. Price had moved to Leaksville in 1924 and had a solo law practice until 1941, when he was joined by his partners D. Floyd Osborne and J. C. Johnson Jr. As state senator, he had been elected president pro tem of the Senate for its 1943 session. He was a corpulent man who smoked cigars and generally wore a hat on the back of his head with the brim turned up all the way around. He had an animated personality that won him many friends. Fellow politicians, lawyers and judges respected him and ordinary people were comfortable with him. He was a worthy opponent to Mr. Scott.^{lxi}

Junior Thompson faced two felony charges, for murder and for breaking and entering. The first charge read: "Criminal Docket number 9428, the State of North Carolina versus Junior Edd Thompson. The charges are as follows: did break and enter the dwelling house of Tom Pratt on the 25th day of August, A. D., 1947, in the night time, where two people were sleeping, with the intent to commit a felony; and did with deliberation, premeditation, and malice aforethought, assault, beat, and murder Tom Pratt."

The second charge read: "Criminal Docket number 9428, the State of North Carolina versus Junior Edd Thompson. The charges are as follows: did break and enter the dwelling house of Tom Pratt on the 25th day of August, A. D., 1947, did feloniously and burglariously did break and enter, with intent, the goods and chattels of the said Tom Pratt in the said dwelling house and then and there being, then and there feloniously and burglariously to steal, take and carry away, against the peace and dignity of the State."^{lxii} Junior Thompson pleaded "not guilty" to both charges. According to Herbert Pratt, as told by his father Jake Pratt, Thompson was dressed in a suit that was exactly like Hampton Price's suit, but with a too-large fit that accentuated his small stature.

After opening statements (which are no longer available to review), the first witness to be called was Ruby Pratt. Although trial transcripts were destroyed, according to the newspaper account by Mutt Burton, Ruby testified that she had awoken to her husband's cries for help and that she saw Junior Thompson in the process of beating him. She ran upstairs after he moved menacingly toward her, but then she came to her husband's aid after she heard the door slam and had assumed that Junior had fled. She said that she had identified Thompson through photographs and the police line-up. Ruby was also asked about the lighting conditions in the room at the time. She testified that a light was on that gave her an adequate view of Thompson.

Under cross-examination by Hampton Price, Ruby denied knowing

Thompson, saying she had only seen him once a long time ago. She maintained this even though the Thompson family had been her neighbors for many years. She also denied that she had told people immediately after the assault that the assailant was a "heavy-set Negro with slicked back hair." Price then asked Ruby about her prior marriages. According to the newspaper account, "Mrs. Pratt also admitted that she had been married twice before her marriage to Pratt and that she had no record of a divorce from either of the first two husbands. She said she was very young at the time of her first marriage and that she thought a divorce had been obtained. She appeared confused about whether her second husband had obtained an annulment of their marriage after finding out about the first husband but declared she believed herself to be legally free at the time of her marriage to Pratt."^{lxiii}

Other witnesses for the state included Dr. Harris, who testified that the injuries to Tom Pratt had been made with a blunt object, not a sharp one. Mr. R. L. Tolbert, Ruby's mill foreman at Fieldcrest, testified about Ruby's employment. (Though the article doesn't say, it was probably a positive evaluation of Ruby's work performance.) Sam Turner was a neighbor who had heard Ruby's screams for help. He had stopped at the Thompson house and borrowed a flashlight from Junior on the way to the house. As a witness for the state, this testimony put Junior in the vicinity of the crime that night. However, Turner went on to testify (probably under cross examination) that he heard Ruby describe the assailant as a "great, big fat" Negro man.

Sheriff Hodges and S.B.I. agent Robert Allen described Ruby's identification of Junior both through photos and the line-up. Sheriff Hodges testified that the Ruby's upstairs bed appeared to have been slept in, which supported Ruby's testimony that she had gone to bed about 9:00 p.m. that night. Hodges and Allen further testified that they had recreated the lighting conditions in the room at the time of the attack and decided it would be

possible to see someone clearly in that light. The state rested its case at 3:45 p.m.

Edna Hoover (Tom's granddaughter and one of the first people on the scene that night) was the first witness for the defense. She testified that she heard Ruby describe the assailant as a "great, big, stocky Negro." She further testified that someone that night had suggested the attacker might be Junior, to which Ruby replied that, had it been Junior, he had grown considerably since she'd last seen him. Mrs. Hoover also testified that she had seen Ruby's bed and that it did not appear to have been slept in. This testimony about Ruby's bed suggested that Ruby had not been awakened by the noise of the attack and that she was lying about the events of that evening. However, under cross-examination by Ralph Scott, Mrs. Hoover stated that Ruby did ask people not disturb anything until police arrived. Harold Hoover, who testified after his wife, stated that Ruby had asked him to get the police and a doctor. Mr. Hoover also testified that the blood on Tom Pratt's face, sheets, and floor was dry when he arrived at the house, which would suggest that Ruby had waited before calling for help. He said that her "vicious" dog was also missing, not to return until morning. Mr. Hoover also said he tried to see under the lighting conditions of the attack and couldn't.

Coy Ratliff, another defense witness, had been the first to arrive on the scene. He, too, said that Ruby had described the assailant as "a great, big, heavy-set Negro." He also said that the blood was dry, that the dog was missing, and that he could not see under those lighting conditions. He said he couldn't tell his wife from his daughter when he tried it. Under cross-examination by Mr. Scott, however, Mr. Ratliff lost some credibility. He admitted that he had not told officers all he knew about the case, saying he was saving his testimony for the trial. He admitted that he had suggested putting Ruby in a jail cell and himself in an adjoining cell to question her while officers listened. One has to

imagine the reaction of the court audience at this remark, which was probably amusement.

The court adjourned at 5:30 p.m. on the first day.

The second day of the trial began with a motion to dismiss all charges. This motion was denied. Coy Ratliff was recalled to the stand to admit, under cross-examination, that he had not told officers at the time that Ruby described the assailant as a fat, heavy-set Negro.^{lxiv}

The next witness was Curtis Land, the deputy sheriff who had been the first law enforcement officer to arrive on the scene. Mr. Land testified that Tom was still bleeding when he arrived, and that Ruby's bed appeared to have been slept in, contradicting earlier witnesses. Mr. Land, who gave his weight at 235 pounds, testified that Ruby had said the assailant was as large as he was. One can imagine the jury looking at the corpulent Mr. Land and comparing him in their minds to skinny, 145-pound Junior Thompson.

Jake Pratt, Tom's oldest son, was next to testify. He repeated Ruby's description of the attacker as "large, heavy-set, fat, stocky, and having long hair that appeared to be slicked back." He said that he had conducted seven or eight tests of the lighting conditions in the house and believed that positive identification of a person in those circumstances would have been "impossible."^{lxv}

Under cross-examination, Jake Pratt was asked how he and the other Pratt heirs felt about their father's marriage to Ruby. He admitted that "we didn't like it" and that "we tried to get him not to marry her." They felt she was too young for him. However, Jake testified that despite their objections to the marriage, relationships remained cordial. He said that they tried to have her removed as executrix of the estate simply on the grounds that she was not legally married to him.

The trial continued. Hampton Price brought forth a total of eight

witnesses who testified they had heard Ruby describe the assailant as "heavy, fat," and so on. Other witnesses included Stover Wynn, Smith Eggleston, and Mrs. Coy (Vera) Ratliff. W. T. Combs was a civil engineer who testified for the defense as to the lighting conditions. Witnesses Clyde Pratt, Garr Price, J. T. Patterson, state highway patrolman Paul Smith, Clay Jeffries, and Robert Barnes, who was currently a lumber dealer and former Leaksville Chief of Police, also had heard Ruby give the "heavy-set" description. Barnes had arrested Thompson in 1945 for breaking and entering, for which he he'd been imprisoned until he escaped.

The defense rested its case at 1:55 p.m. At 2:15, Price renewed his motion for dismissal of the charges. He won a partial victory when Judge Bobbitt dismissed the burglary charge. Summations then began, though we have no record of what was said. The newspaper account suggests that Mr. Price closed the day.

The following morning, state solicitor Ralph Scott delivered his summation to the jury. Although we do not know what was said, the newspaper account reported that Scott spoke for an hour and a half, asking for a first-degree murder conviction.^{lxvi} One wonders if he reviewed every word of testimony in that 90 minutes. One wonders if the jury grew weary.

At 11:30, Judge Bobbitt began his instructions to the jury, spending an hour and 20 minutes doing so. There were four possible verdicts, he said: guilty of first-degree murder; guilty of second-degree murder, guilty of manslaughter, or not guilty. After a lunch recess, the jury began its deliberations at 1:30 p.m. Mutt Burton reported,

"When, an hour later, the jury returned the verdict of not guilty there was a brief ovation from the main floor of the court room filled with white citizens. The demonstration of approval was stilled by a sharp rap from Judge Bobbitt's gavel."^{lxvii}

The white audience had cheered when Junior Thompson was

acquitted, but he was not a free man. He was returned to prison to serve out his term for the 1945 crime, with time added to his sentence because of the escape.

Hampton Price's Strategy for the Defense

Junior Thompson never took the stand in his own defense. Instead, Mr. Price's skill was to turn the testimony into a trial about Ruby's credibility, as if she were the one being accused of the crime. The newspaper accounts suggest that Mr. Price's strategy was to malign Ruby's character with references to her prior marriages, suggestions that she could be devious (note the phrase, "after finding out about the first husband" from the newspaper account), and hints that she was not trustworthy. If Mr. Scott objected to this line of questioning, that did not appear in the newspaper reports.

Having planted the seed that Ruby could not be trusted, the rest of the testimony proved to be fertile soil. In addition, by adding questions about whether Tom Pratt's bleeding had stopped, whether Ruby's bed had been slept in, and where her dog had disappeared to, Mr. Price fed the appearance of guilt that was forming around Ruby. The thrust of the trial shifted from Junior Thompson's guilt or innocence to Ruby's credibility. According to The Leaksville News, "Aside from Mrs. Pratt's testimony, little evidence against Thompson was produced at the trial."^{lxviii} Scott had Ruby's much disputed eyewitness testimony; he had Sam Turner's testimony that he had borrowed a flashlight from Thompson before going to the Pratt house which put Thompson near the crime scene, and he had some witnesses who said they thought the attacker could be viewed under the lighting conditions (though others refuted it).

If Mr. Scott had blood evidence from the jacket found at the arrest, it was not entered at the trial. Why didn't Mr. Scott make a better case against Junior Thompson? Thompson had been convicted of breaking and entering after

midnight on January 11, 1945, which would suggest that if he had done it before, it was possible that he had done it again. Was this information not allowed at this trial? Did he just assume that the word of a white woman was all that was required for a conviction? It's really not a surprise that the verdict was "not guilty." Mr. Scott had not made a case against Thompson, while Mr. Price *had* made *his* case—against Ruby Pratt.



Ruby Pratt's photo ran adjacent to "Colored News" in the Leaksville News. This could have indicated a subtle censure.
(The poor quality of the image is due to the microfilm and photocopy process.)

Rebuilding a Reputation?

Three weeks after the trial in late November, The Greensboro Daily News and the Leaksville News^{lxix} both carried follow-up stories about Ruby Pratt. In a photo that ran in both editions, she is seated with her dog at her feet. Beverly Robertson was married to the editor of the Leaksville News, and she sometimes wrote articles for both papers. By reading articles together, it is clear that the Leaksville News article, which had no byline, is an edited version of the Greensboro Daily News article.

The Greensboro article appeared to be sympathetic to Ruby. There was no mention of her prior marriages. Ruby praised the efforts of Sheriff Hodges and Agent Allen, but asked for a continued investigation and additional help from Governor Cherry. Robertson quoted the governor as saying "I agree that this crime should be solved and I will be glad to have the State Bureau of Investigation render such aid as may be possible in solving the case."^{lxx}

Robertson also interviewed Sheriff Hodges, who said, "We are continuing our investigation of this case and are probing all angles. We do not intend to stop until the murderer is caught and convicted. The case was made doubly difficult to solve because of the number of rumors about the case as well as a lot of prejudice in the community." This was an interesting quote, in that "prejudice" was not displayed against the young black man, but rather, it is implied, against the divorcee. Ruby, for her part, opined, "If another trial is held, the jury should be selected from outside of Rockingham from people who know nothing of the case and who have not known those involved." One can infer that Ruby believed that the Pratt family, with its public support of Junior Thompson, had held sway over the jury.

The article ended with this statement: "[Ruby Pratt] feels that justice will rule in the end, and the murderer will receive his reward." We do not know how Ruby came to do these interviews—perhaps she was simply asked and agreed. Had she hoped to repair some of her damaged reputation? If so, this article made a good impression.

But what of the account in the Leaksville newspaper? Her own hometown paper was not so generous. Commenting on the photo of Ruby and her dog, it noted that the dog was "said to have been missing" from her home that night, implying that it was not really missing at all. Gone was her praise for the investigative team; gone was her request for Governor Cherry's assistance. Gone was Sheriff Hodge's quote about rumors and prejudice. The brief article

ended with her statement about the murderer getting his "just reward" and stated that Ruby was a second shift worker for Fieldcrest. But perhaps the most glaring clue to the newspaper's sympathies was not what was printed in the article, but where the article appeared: in the back pages of the newspaper, next to a feature called "Colored News."^{lxxi} News for African Americans living in Leaksville was printed in its own column. (Perhaps this could have been seen as an advance—without this column, there may have been no news about the black community at all. Nevertheless, this is more evidence of the ubiquity of segregation.) That her photo was directly to the left of the headline "Colored News" suggests that she was seen as a second-class citizen.

Even though Sheriff Hodges had publicly stated that the investigation would continue, no further arrests were made for the murder of Tom Pratt. It seems as though the investigation was simply dropped. This case is technically still open.

Tom Pratt's farm was sold for \$9,700 to Yancey Joyce, who had owned land adjoining the farm when Tom died. Other income from the estate included rents, sale of hay and rye, tools, a hog and so on. Ruby received \$25 for her share of the hog. No will was ever found; therefore, the property was divided equally among Tom's six children. After the burial and other expenses, each received \$1,716.61.^{lxxii}

While Sheriff Munsey Hodges's career had had its ups and downs over the years,^{lxxiii} his younger brother Luther Hodges's career had been meteoric from his days at the Marshall Field textile mills in Leaksville, elevating him to vice president of the company in New York. Luther retired from Marshall Field in 1947 and spent one year as chief of the industry division of the Economic Cooperation Administration (the Marshall Plan) in West Germany. He returned to Leaksville and, at the urging of friends, ran for lieutenant governor. He took office in 1953. When Governor William Ulmstead died in office in 1954, Luther

Hodges became Governor. He appointed Munsey to be district supervisor of prison camps with the North Carolina Prison Department. Munsey stayed in that position until ill health forced him to retire in July 1962. He died one month later. Luther Hodges, meanwhile, served as governor until 1960, during which time he founded Research Triangle Park, now one of the largest research complexes in the world. Later, Hodges served as secretary of commerce in the cabinets of presidents Kennedy and Johnson. He died in 1974.

Jake Pratt retired from Spray Cotton Mills in 1961 after more than forty years of service. He died in 1973. Clyde Pratt was the long-time superintendent at the Leaksville Woolen Mill and died in 1987.



Ruby Edwards' photo
from her church annual

Ruby retook her maiden name, Edwards. She moved in with relatives, never remarried, and continued to work for Fieldcrest until her retirement. In 1956, she became a member of the Floyd Baptist Church, about three miles west of the Pratt home, which she attended faithfully with her sisters for 50 years. Later friends and acquaintances did not know about her early marriages or her involvement with the famous murder case in 1947.^{lxxiv} She died on March 27,

2001, at the age of 91 and is buried in the Edwards family plot at her church.

In 1967, the towns of Leaksville, Spray and Draper merged to form a new incorporated city. They called their new city "Eden."

The Life of Junior Edd Thompson, Outlaw

After his acquittal in the Pratt murder, Junior Thompson, now known as Edward Thompson, returned to the state prison farm in 1947 to finish serving his 1945 sentence for burglary. Whether innocent or guilty in the Pratt murder,

the rest of his life was spent in a cycle of crime and prison. Between 1950 and 1968 he was charged with crimes on five separate occasions for breaking, entering, larceny and receiving, felonious assault, and assaulting a female. Each time he was sent to prison and he escaped at least once. He was released from state prison in Hendersonville and on May 7, 1968.

Two days later, on May 9, 1968, Thompson began a crime spree that lasted for two months in which he eluded capture many times. He first kidnapped a North Carolina couple, stealing their car, then released them. About a month later he kidnapped more young couples, raped the females, and later released them.

Frustrated law enforcement officials were desperate to catch Thompson. Henderson County Sheriff James Kilpatrick made an unusual request of the court, which was granted. On June 25, 1968, Buncombe County Superior Court Judge W. K. McClean had Edward Thompson declared an "outlaw." This seldom-used nineteenth-century statute made it legally allowable for any citizen to shoot and kill Thompson with impunity if he did not surrender to citizen's arrest. Anyone with a gun would be allowed, without penalty, to shoot and kill Edward Thompson. In 1968, North Carolina was one of the few states in the country that still had such a statute on the books.

If Thompson was aware of his new legal status, it didn't stop him. On July 15, he kidnapped three teenaged girls in Virginia, murdering their parents with shots to the head. Over the next few days, he raped the girls, put them in the trunk of the stolen car and drove them seventy miles, to North Carolina, on a ninety-one degree day. Hundreds of police officers searched the Roanoke area as well as Rockingham County, but to no avail. On July 16 Thompson went to his family home on Price Road, now owned by his younger brother Pete. Pete told him to leave and called the police immediately. Thompson then went in search of his brother Weldon. Weldon said to him, "Why don't you go and

give up?" Thompson replied sarcastically, "Huh, will I?" Weldon's wife Lennis had meanwhile whispered the numbers of the license plate to her granddaughter who scratched them into the dirt. As Thompson drove off, Lennis called the police.

Finally, Greensboro police set up a roadblock on the southbound side of Route 220 between Eden and Greensboro. Officers were able to capture Thompson peacefully and rescue the terrified girls.

For the second time in 20 years, Thompson's notoriety landed him on page 1— this time of The Washington Post, on July 17, 1968.^{lxxv} His crime spree had terrorized two states and compelled the granting of "outlaw" status. On July 18, 1968, the Greensboro Daily News ran a lead editorial decrying the century-old statute, stating, "that statute in effect legalized vigilante justice. It permits, under law, the execution of a suspect without a trial. ... If anything, the apprehension of Edward Thompson proved how utterly unnecessary this statute is. ... The police did their job well, and in so doing they demonstrated that the job should be left to them."^{lxxvi}

Prior to the Edward Thompson case, the statute had not been invoked since 1960. It was declared unconstitutional by a federal district court in 1976 and repealed in 1997.

There were no more escapes for Edward Thompson. He was convicted on October 18, 1968.^{lxxvii} He entered Central Prison in Raleigh and spent the rest of his life behind bars. He died of AIDS on July 18, 1989, at the age of 58. His remains were cremated.^{lxxviii}

A Foreshadowing of American Themes

In 1947, the civil rights movement had not yet begun. Segregation was a way of life, not only in the neighborhoods and business establishments, but even in marriage registers, the city directory, and newspapers. Jury lists were

"color-coded." Given those conditions, Tom's sons made an astonishing decision that was based on their view of justice, without considering race. And just as astonishing, perhaps, is that the white citizens apparently supported their decision.

Likewise, no one had ever heard of "women's liberation" or imagined the societal changes that would be taking place in the coming decades. But one expansion of legal equality for women was pushed a bit further, coincidentally, with this murder, when women served on the jury for the first time in a capital case in North Carolina. In contrast, one woman who refused to conform to the prescribed role for women paid dearly for her choices. Although the case turned on her description of the attacker that didn't match the suspect, Ruby's unconventional life of three marriages became a focal point of the trial, to which the solicitor apparently did not object. That she did not reveal this part of her life story to later friends suggests that she struggled with having to rebuild her reputation over time. Meanwhile, Susie Sharp, whose father and law partner investigated Ruby's past marriages, was practicing law before women were allowed to serve on juries. She fought sexism throughout her career and prevailed by achieving the pinnacle of her profession in her state, chief justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court.

Men whose careers were still unfolding also met at the crossroads of Tom Pratt's murder. Defense attorney Hampton Price was already a state senator; Sheriff Munsey Hodges was the brother of a future governor and presidential cabinet member. Over time, Solicitor Ralph Scott would later become a United States congressman; Judge William Bobbitt would be a North Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice. Mutt Burton became an award-winning journalist and actor. Finally, Junior Thompson turned into an outlaw who made page one of a national newspaper and ignited a debate about the proper role of civilians in law enforcement. None of them knew, in 1947, what fate would

bring. But all of them played a role in the Tom Pratt murder case.

Tom Pratt was a humble man, so it is ironic that so many who were involved in the case later became famous or infamous. His murder raised issues of race relations, gender roles, morality and justice, foreshadowing the vast changes that were to occur in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Notes:

ⁱ Greensboro Daily News, August 26, 1947, section 1; page 3.

ⁱⁱ Burton, W. C. "Mrs. Pratt Points to Junior Thompson as One Who Left Murdered Man's Room," Greensboro Daily News, November 5, 1947, Section 2, page 4.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Leaksville News, The Reidsville Review, The Madison Messenger

^{iv} Tom Pratt's parents were William Frederick (Fred) Pratt (1832-1897) and Lucy Elizabeth (Bettie) Martin Pratt (1846-1935). Their eleven children were: William Thomas Pratt (Tom) (1866-1947), Sarah Frances (Fannie) (1868-1951), Nancy Kinnie (1870-1941), Samuel Andrew (Sam) (1873-1957), John Richard (1875-1955), Maggie (1877-1961), M. Frederick (Fred) (1878-1954), Robert James (Jim) (1880-1956), Charles Fields (Charlie) (1881-1961), Harvey Judson (1883-1954), and Annie Dell (1886-1959). They lived on land currently marked as Rockingham County Road 1562, no longer owned by the Pratt family. However, a small Pratt family cemetery is there, where Tom's parents, some other relatives, and his daughter Alma are buried. Fred Pratt was a native of Henry County, Virginia. See also: Pratt, Herbert T. "The William Frederick Pratt Family Cemetery."

Rockingham County Historical Society, Inc. Newsletter, Series III, no. 74, September 30, 1994, pp. 14-16.

^v Laura Nettie Morgan (April 7, 1866 -March 26, 1936) was born to James Morgan (1818-1894) and Sallie Hyler Norton Morgan (1827-1900). Their children were William T. (b. 1846), Eliza C. (b. 1849), Mintora T. (1853 - 1901), Mary L. (b. 1854), James R. (b. 1856), Robert R. (1858-1893), Charles Anthony (1861-1907), Roxey A. (b. 1863), Laura Nettie and Sarah E. (b. 1889).

James Morgan, Nettie's father, owned a grist and flourmill on Buffalo Island Creek above the present NC 770 bridge. He was also licensed by the federal government to distill whiskey, paying a tax on what he sold. A seal on the bung of the whiskey barrel proved that the tax had been paid.

But Mr. Morgan had whiskey barrels with bungs on both ends. One end had the seal; the other end didn't. When the tax revenuers came around, he made sure they saw the end with the seal. The federal agents apparently never detected his trick.

^{vi} Tom and Nettie's children were: Pearl Pratt Holland (1887-1960) married to Dan Holland; W. Alma Pratt, (1891-1908); Thomas Boaz Pratt (Jake) (1896-1973) married to Josie Smith Pratt (1898-1975); Clyde Milton Pratt (1898-1987) married to Fannie Sue Cox Pratt; James R. Pratt (1901-1962) married to Evie Collins Pratt (1902-1974); Betty Hyler Pratt Turner (1907-1998) married to Martin Turner; Robert Reid Pratt (1903-1960) married to Custis Talbert Pratt (1915 - ____).

^{vii} Tom built his first house on the land he had inherited from his father, where he lived with Nettie and their young family. They sold it in 1910 so that they could move to town. They lived in town from 1910 to 1930 at what is now 109 Johnson Street, Eden, N. C.

^{viii} Nettie actually purchased the vacant lot at 109 Johnson Street, perhaps from inherited money. Her name alone was on the deed, an unusual circumstance in those days. It might indicate that she was a better businessperson than he was, as he apparently tended toward being somewhat impulsive. He once bought a Model T Ford, though he never learned to drive. Tom built the house on the lot that they lived in for 20 years, and the house is still standing.

^{ix} From Tom Pratt's personal papers.

^x Wilson, Leonard, Ed. *Makers of American, Biographies of Leading Men of Thought and Action*, Vol II. Washington D.C.: B. F. Johnson, Inc., 1916.

^{xi} Dump Ivie's given name was Allan Denny Ivie, Sr. (1873-1927). Why he was called "Dump" is not known. He was well known in the county because he had been a prominent attorney, justice of the peace, and a two-term state senator. The son, Allan Denny Ivie Jr. (1907-1987) became a district attorney for the area that included Rockingham County and had a reputation for being rather eccentric. He was a tall, slightly overweight man with thick, long gray hair who wore seersucker suits with bat-wing collars all year round, long after the styles had changed. The "paper trail"

of the land deal between Allan Ivie and Tom Pratt was found in Tom Pratt's papers.

^{xii} The deed to the property said, "Beginning at an iron stump, a corner of Polk Thompson, with J. A. Pratt and running thence with the line of J. A. Pratt and T. R. Pratt, N. 85 degrees W. 1304 feet to an iron at the root of a fallen white oak..." The adjoining property of J. A. Pratt and T. R. Pratt belonged to some distant cousins of Tom's, but they didn't live there. Polk Thompson was Edd Thompson's father and Junior Thompson's grandfather, but he was not living there at the time of these events.

^{xiii} Tom and Nettie purchased eighty-six acres from Allan D. Ivie Jr. on June 2, 1930, and immediately sold four parcels of it, probably to raise some cash. The house itself was built in 1813, according to a date stone set in the chimney. They sold fifteen acres to grandson-in-law Harold Hoover, two acres to "Patterson" (first name unknown), one acre to Fletcher Pratt (nephew to Tom), and four acres to "Edwards" (first name unknown), possibly one of Ruby's brothers. Since this sale occurred many years before Tom and Ruby began "courting," it is not known whether Tom knew Ruby at this time. Ruby would have been 19 years old and married to Carl Meeks. After all the sales, Tom and Nettie owned sixty-four acres of land.

^{xiv} In 1932 he cut up ten cords of slabs, hauled them into town and sold it to the Carolina Cotton and Woolen Mills Company. He was paid \$3.50. From Tom Pratt's personal papers.

^{xv} The amount of tobacco that one farmer was allowed to grow was restricted after Franklin Roosevelt became president in 1932, as a way to keep competition and prices up. Bills of sale from Tom Pratt's papers to the tobacco warehouses show varying amounts of tobacco produced. In 1945, Tom sold 688 pounds of differing quality for between thirty-five cents and forty-seven cents per pound, totaling \$319.54 for his crop. Two years later, the year he died in 1947, he sold 304 pounds for only \$55.04. The price per pound was only between eleven cents and twenty-nine cents, probably due to broken leaves, which could be used for snuff but not cigarettes.

^{xvi} Personal communication with Winifred (Wink) Hoover, son of Harold and Edna Hoover. 2003.

^{xvii} Tom's youngest son Reid was born in 1903. Ruby was born in 1910 and died in 2001.

^{xviii} As evidence of the ubiquity of racial segregation, the Rockingham County Marriage Registers were segregated by race, with separate books for "white" and "colored." On June 12, 1967, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that states could not bar interracial marriages. The North Carolina General Assembly did not officially repeal the ban until 1977. Tom and Ruby were white.

^{xix} The person who married Tom and Ruby was listed as J. P. McCabe in the Henry County, Virginia, marriage register. It can be assumed that it is the same Dr. McCabe who was pastor of the First Baptist Church in Martinsville, Virginia in the 1940s. They may have married in a church, but it is just as likely that Dr. McCabe performed weddings at the courthouse on his days off for a little extra money. That he was listed repeatedly in the register would suggest that this was so. Marriage register from Henry County, Virginia, December 13, 1943.

^{xx} Personal communications with Tom Pratt's grandchildren Hazel Estes, Colleen Shropshire, and Ray Turner, and daughter-in-law Custis Pratt.

^{xxi} A bill of sale for tobacco, dated, January 24, 1947 to Ratliff and Pratt from Brown's Warehouse in Stoneville, N. C., shows that Tom partnered with Coy Ratliff and sold tobacco the year he died. (See Figure 3.)

^{xxii} "Negro Escapee Captured After Intensified Search," Reidsville Review, September 4, 1947.

^{xxiii} "Intensive Investigation Made to Locate Assailant of 81-Year Old Tom Pratt," The Leaksville News, August 28, 1947. Whether Tom "recognized his assailant" as was suggested by Sheriff Hodges was total speculation. Tom never said that he did.

^{xxiv} Personal communication with Wink Hoover, quoting Ruby Edwards, 2003.

^{xxv} Winifred (Wink) Hoover later had a career in social work. He served on the Eden City school board and served two terms as the Commissioner on the Rockingham County Board of Commissioners from 1996 to 2004.

^{xxvi} Description of events on the night of the attack from personal communication with Wink Hoover, 2003.

^{xxvii} Jake Pratt was certain that he had recently seen the ax on the porch. In the course of the investigation, he asked Sheriff Hodges to search Tom's well for the ax. "Well-digger Jones" performed the service. It was not there. Personal communication with Herbert T. Pratt, son of Jake Pratt.

^{xxviii} Burton, W. C. "S. B. I. Called In on Pratt Murder Case by Rockingham County Sheriff," Greensboro Daily News, August 27, 1947, section 1, page 2.

W. C. Burton is now listed as the author of the Pratt murder articles appearing in the Greensboro Daily News, which up to this date, did not have a byline. William Clarence Burton made his byline W. C. Burton, though everyone knew him as Mutt. He started his career in 1936 with the Greensboro Daily News (later called The Greensboro News and Record) and, except for the three years he spent in the Army, stayed there until retirement, writing his last column a few months before his death at age 88 in 1995. Journalism and theatre appeared to be equally important to him, and he enjoyed a distinguished career in both. He was inducted into the North Carolina Hall of Fame in Journalism in 1994 and received an honorary doctorate of fine arts from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) in 1981. He published Christmas in my Bones (Asheboro, North Carolina: Down Home Press, 1991) at the age of 83. The North Carolina Theatre Conference awarded him a distinguished career award for a lifetime of service to theatre. According to an editorial that ran after his death, he had said in a lecture, "The theatre teaches us to really observe and get pleasure from the simple everyday things. It teaches us to see as well as to look, and taste and swallow. We really don't take time to look at one another. We take too much for granted. We don't really see things." ("W. C. 'Mutt' Burton, Columnist and Colleague," Greensboro News & Record, December 2, 1995.) Perhaps Burton's ability to deeply observe human nature made him both a good actor and a great reporter. In his 60-year acting career, he appeared throughout the southeast, at venues including the UNCG theatre, and Western Carolina's Parkway and Flat Rock playhouses. In 1979 he appeared in the movie "Being There," which starred with Shirley MacLaine and Peter Sellers. His daughter Martha Jane Wilkinson described him as "the quintessential southern gentleman—a bon vivant who never met a stranger."

^{xxix} A copy of the death certificate contains many errors (see Figure 4).

^{xxx} Burton, W. C. "Bloodhounds Join Hunt for Rockingham Escapee," Greensboro Daily News, September 3, 1947.

^{xxxi} "Pratt Killer Identified as Negro Escapee," Reidsville Review, August 29, 1947, p. 5.

"Widow Identifies Pratt Murderer From Photograph," Greensboro Daily News, August 29, 1947, section 1, page 2.

^{xxxii} From "Progress Made by Sheriff's Department in Past Seven Months is Shown in Report," The Leaksville News, August 28 1947. According to the newspaper account of the report, in Hodges' first seven months as Sheriff, his department had located and captured thirty-four stills and seven cars loaded with bootleg whiskey. They had destroyed 5,700 gallons of mash and 1,100 gallons of whiskey, seized and destroyed eight illegal slot machines, seized three truckloads of bottled-in-bond whiskey and sold it to the ABC stores in other counties, giving the proceeds of \$12,770 to the county school fund.

Also noted in the report, the force had patrolled 119,267 miles of unincorporated territory including escorts for seventy-two funerals. There had been 1,549 arrests made with 682 deputy officers assisting. The deputies had served twenty execution notices, thirty-five claims and deliveries, eleven tax suits, fifty-seven notices, 228 summonses, and 375 subpoenas. Deputies spent sixty-six days in Superior court. Revenue of \$2,865 was added to the county treasury from the sale of confiscated property. Fifty-six investigations and forty-seven search warrants resulted in the recovery of \$7,180 of stolen property. They had traveled 8,443 miles conveying 252 prisoners and 298 miles (as per the article) "carrying two lunatics to asylums."

^{xxxiii} It is not known whether the money was ever paid, or who the local businessman was. The Greensboro Daily News reported that the amount was \$300. The Leaksville News, August 28, 1947; Greensboro Daily News, August 27, 1947, section 1, page 3.

^{xxxiv} Robert A. Allen was born in 1913 and was 34 years old when he helped track down Junior Thompson in the Virginia woods in 1947. A native of Reidsville, he served as the Reidsville chief of police and as an agent for the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation from 1946 to 1951. He died in 1969 at age 56.

^{xxxv} Personal communication with Wink Hoover, 2003.

^{xxxvi} Personal communication with Herbert Pratt, who headed the Analytical and Applied Chemistry group at Fieldcrest Mills in Leaksville, N. C. from 1946 to 1952.

^{xxxvii} Tom and his neighbor Ed Thompson may have had a little disagreement at some point, as indicated by the notice that was found in Tom Pratt's papers, which said, "State of North Carolina, County of Rockingham. To. Mr. Ed. Thompson:- This is to notify you to keep your chickens off my premises under penalty of the law. This the 28th day of

April 1931. Signed W T Pratt." A line for "witness" was blank. The notice was typed, and it is unknown whether a copy was ever delivered.

^{xxxviii} Carl Thompson, Eden N.C., personal communication, 2003.

^{xxxix} Information obtained from court documents, Rockingham County Courthouse, Wentworth, N.C.

^{xl} "Bloodhounds Track Down Negro Wanted For Brutal Slaying of Thomas Pratt,"

The Leaksville News, September 11, 1947, vol. 24, #24, page 1.

See also: Burton, W. C., "Bloodhounds Join Hunt for Rockingham Escapee; Prison Camps Supervisor Sends Animals in Charge of Keeper," Greensboro Daily News, September 3, 1947, section 2, p. 8.

^{xli} "Widow Identifies Thompson in Line-Up at Guilford Jail," Greensboro Daily News, September 5, 1947, section 1, p. 1.

^{xlii} The law firm of Sharp and Sharp, in Reidsville, N.C., was among the best law firms in the state. James Sharp, then 70, practiced law with his partner and daughter, Susie Sharp. That "Miss Susie" was a practicing attorney was a source of local pride in an era when women were not legally allowed to serve on juries. That she was unmarried (and remained so for life) was probably considered for the best, since naturally she would be expected to abandon her career if a husband were to be found. Susie Sharp worked with her father from 1929 to 1949. She was the first, and for many years, the only female lawyer in Rockingham County, beginning a lifetime of breaking barriers for women. In 1929, many years before women were allowed on juries, Susie Sharp was in the courtroom, very often the only woman there. In her first trial at the Rockingham County Courthouse, she faced district attorney Alan Denney Ivie, Jr. (who coincidentally had sold his father's farm on Price Road to Tom Pratt.) Mr. Ivie began his summation to the jury with the following remark: "Gentlemen of the jury, the presence of sweet womanhood in this courtroom today rarefies the atmosphere." She remained amused by that comment for the rest of her life. See Hoyle, Bernadette W. "North Carolina's First Woman Judge to Add Luster to Bench," Greensboro Daily News, June 26, 1949.

In 1949, Susie Sharp was appointed the first female superior court justice in the state of North Carolina. In 1962, she became the first female associate justice of any state supreme court in the nation. In 1974, she was appointed chief justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court, also a "female first" for the United States. Among her many honors and accolades, Time

magazine put her on its cover on January 6, 1976, as one of twelve "women of the year" for 1975. See "A Dozen Who Made a Difference," Time, January 6, 1976. She died on March 1, 1996, at age 88.

^{xliii} Jake Pratt, who ran slubbing machines at Spray Cotton Mills, and Clyde, a superintendent for the Leaksville Woolen Mill, were not college educated, and may have felt a little intimidated visiting an attorney. Herbert, a recent college graduate, was invited to come along to take notes and perhaps help clarify anything Mr. Sharp would have to say.

^{xliv} Herbert T. Pratt, Jake's son, had gone with his dad and his Uncle Clyde to the meeting with Mr. Sharp, where he took notes and was briefly introduced to "Miss Susie." Herbert worked at Fieldcrest Mills from 1946 to 1952, then joined the DuPont Company in Wilmington, Delaware, as a textile chemist. In the 1970s, he became one of the earliest specialists in the forensic science of man-made fibers and helped solve a number of high profile murders in the United States and Canada, including the Wayne Williams case of black child murders in Atlanta, the Hillside strangler case in Los Angeles, and the Ted Bundy case in Florida. Herbert's love of chemical history inspired him to gain National Historic Chemical Landmark status for the Willson Aluminum Company of Spray, North Carolina, where chemist Thomas L. Willson discovered an inexpensive method for making acetylene gas in 1892. (Publication: Pratt, Herbert T. "The History of the Willson Aluminum Company, Spray, North Carolina 1891-1986." The Journal of Rockingham County History and Genealogy, Vol. XVII, No. 1, June, 1992, pp. 1-26.)

^{xlv} Obituary of J. Hampton Price, The Eden News, January 5, 1972.

J. Hampton (Hamp) Price was born November 20, 1899, and grew up in Stoneville, North Carolina. Perhaps like many college students today, he spent too much time socializing and not enough time studying. After one year at Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina, he transferred to Washington and Lee University, where his first-term grades were abysmal. He made a C and an E in commerce I and II, a D in politics, and Fs in English and hygiene. However, he did win an oratorical medal, which perhaps foretold his career in law and politics. He earned his LLM (Master of Laws) in 1924. (Transcript from Washington and Lee University.)

Price was a member of the state Democratic Executive Committee and a delegate to the national convention in Philadelphia in 1948. He served six terms in the North Carolina senate and was elected president pro tem, the state's third highest office, of the 1943 Senate. <www.politicalgraveyard.com>

Price and his wife Sallie Hester (Lane) Price never had any children. However, Price's law partner in Leaksville, Floyd Osborne, and his wife Elizabeth (Fulcher) Osborne, named two of their own children "J. Hampton Price" and "Sallie." Hamp Price died in 1972.

^{xlvi} It had been Pratt family legend that the Pratts had hired Hampton Price to defend Junior Thompson, but no known papers exist that support this. It can be assumed to be true based on the following: 1., rumor always told it; 2., it is unlikely that the Thompson family would have been able to afford the legal fees, or would have approached the famous attorney; 3., Carl Thompson, Junior's distant cousin, said that his family also always said that it happened this way.

^{xlvi} Jess Moore, retired attorney, Reidsville, N.C., personal communication, 2004.

Ann Williams, personal communication, 2004.

^{xlvi} "Dated Negro," Greensboro Daily News, November 2, 1947.

^{xlvi} The headline that ran in the Madison (N.C.) Messenger after Junior's acquittal was, "Negro is Acquitted of Murdering White Man." How often was the testimony of a white witness, no matter how flimsy, challenged when it came to a black defendant?

ⁱ "Thompson Will Have Hearing Here Friday," The Leaksville News, September 18, 1947.

"Grand Jury to Get Pratt Murder Case," The Leaksville News, October 2, 1947.

^{li} Jury, Legal Aspects, Selecting Jurors.

<<http://law.jrank.org/pages/1434/jury-Legal-Aspects-Selecting-jurors.html>>

^{lii} "The First Woman to Serve," The Leaksville News, September 18, 1947; and "Junior Edd Thompson Murder Trial Begins in Superior Court," Reidsville Review, November 4, 1947.

^{liii} "Women Ask How To Get Off of Jury; Power of Clerk In Matter Shown," Greensboro Daily News, August 10, 1947, p. 1.

^{liv} William Haywood Bobbitt had been elected judge on the democratic ticket in the 14th Judicial District (Charlotte) in 1938. It was in this capacity that he served as the judge in Junior Thompson's murder trial. He was appointed associate justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court in

1954 and served as chief justice from 1969 to 1974. When he retired, he recommended his dear friend Susie Sharp for the post of chief justice.

Bobbitt and Sharp had a close friendship that lasted many long years. According to A.C. Snow, another friend, "For over 25 years, this friendship sustained the two of them through good times, difficult times, and tragic times. Throughout them all, they were there to share each other's sparkling wit, their keen interest in all things legal and governmental, and to comfort, support, and buoy each other in times of crisis." Even after the death of his wife Sarah in 1965, Bobbitt and Sharp never married. William Bobbitt died on September 27, 1992, at the age of 91. <www.aoc.state.nc.us/www/copyright/sc/portrait/sharp1.html>

^{lv} The Baldwin's Tri-Cities Directory was a precursor to the phone directory. The directory listed everyone in the town by name, spouse's name, address, phone number if they had one, and occupation, and employer. Businesses and churches were also listed. Black individuals and churches were signified by a ©, for "colored."

^{lvi} Court documents on this trial were available from the archives at the Rockingham County Courthouse and included the Order for Special Venire, the jury pool list, and the formal charges against Junior Thompson. Amazingly, the trial transcript was destroyed, as was the custom when a defendant was acquitted. Information about the trial itself was obtained from newspaper accounts.

^{lvii} "Two Women on Jury for Trial of First Degree Murder Case," No reference, clipping from Custis Pratt Talbert papers. Approximate date November 5, 1947.

^{lviii} W. C. "Mutt" Burton articles that were found on this topic, in chronological order:

Burton, W. C. "S. B. I. Called In on Pratt Murder Case by Rockingham County Sheriff," Greensboro Daily News, August 27, 1947.

--- "Bloodhounds Join Hunt for Rockingham Escapee," Greensboro Daily News, September 3, 1947.

--- "Thompson Seized in Virginia as Bloodhounds Trail Negro," Greensboro Daily News, September 4, 1947.

--- "Mrs. Pratt Points to Junior Thompson as One Who Left Murdered Man's Room," Greensboro Daily News, November 5, 1947.

--- "Court Nonsuits Charge of Burglary and Denies Same Motion in Murder Court in Wentworth," Greensboro Daily News, November 6, 1947.

— — — "Young Leaksville Negro Innocent; Mixed Jury Returns Quick Verdict," Greensboro Daily News, November 7, 1947.

Note: The Reidsville Review was a weekly paper in 1947.

^{lix} "Scott, Ralph James," Stokes County (North Carolina) Natives, biography #859. Ralph James Scott was re-elected solicitor in 1950 and 1954. He resigned this position in 1956 when he was elected to the United States Congress, to represent the fifth congressional district. He served from 1957 to 1967, declining to run for a sixth term. A staunch fiscal conservative, he felt ineffective in the face of "overwhelming liberal forces" in control of the House. "Any gimlet-eyed nitwit that we meet on the street today knows that he can't live beyond his means; no less so can the federal government if it is to retain the confidence of the American people and the respect and confidence of the world at large." In 1980 he donated fifty acres of land to Stokes County in Danbury, North Carolina, to build a new courthouse and county building. He died in 1983.

^{lx} "Scott, Ralph James," Biographical Dictionary of the United States Congress, 1774-Present, <www.bioguide.congress.gov/>

^{lxi} J. Hampton (Hamp) Price was a member of the state Democratic Executive Committee and a delegate to the national convention in Philadelphia in 1948. He served six terms in the North Carolina senate.

^{lxii} Papers associated with the trial, but not the transcript that was destroyed, were obtained from county and state records.

^{lxiii} Burton, W. C. "Mrs. Pratt Points to Junior Thompson As One Who Left Murdered Man's Room," Greensboro Daily News, November 5, 1947. Note the phrase, "after finding out about the first husband" that Burton reported from the trial regarding her divorces, suggesting that she had not revealed the truth about her first marriage to her second husband, and that this fact was brought out at the trial.

^{lxiv} Burton, W. C. "Court Nonsuits Charge of Burglary and Denies Same Motion on Murder Count in Wentworth," Greensboro Daily News, November 6, 1947.

^{lxv} Jake Pratt and many others "tested the lighting conditions" of the house. The crime scene was hardly secured by today's standards.

^{lxvi} Burton, W. C. "Young Leaksville Negro Innocent; Mixed Jury Returns Quick Verdict," Greensboro Daily News, November 7, 1947.

^{lxvii} Burton, W. C. "Young Leaksville Negro Innocent; Mixed Jury Returns Quick Verdict," Greensboro Daily News, November 7, 1947.

^{lxviii} "Jr. Thompson 'Not Guilty' in Pratt Case; Colored Boy is Acquitted of Murder Charge Because of Insufficient Evidence," The Leaksville News, November 13, 1947.

^{lxix} Robertson, Beverly W. "Widow of Murdered Man Asks State Aid in Hunt for Slayer," Greensboro Daily News, no date; clipping from Josie E. Pratt papers; and

"Widow of Murdered Man and Her Pet Collie," The Leaksville News, November 27, 1947, (no byline).

^{lxx} Robertson, Beverly W. "Widow of Murdered Man Asks State Aid in Hunt for Slayer," Greensboro Daily News, no date; clipping from Josie E. Pratt papers.

^{lxxi} In the September 11, 1947 issue of the Leaksville News (vol. 24, #24), a headline reads: "Correspondent Wanted to Write Colored News." The paragraph reads, "Wanted—correspondent to write and bring in news about actives of colored people. The pay is small but there is an opportunity to see what you write in print. It is not necessary, but preferable, that you have a telephone. Any colored person interested may contact The News office at its new location." Maxine Allen was writing articles by late September, 1947, for this column. Besides the fact that people are segregated by race in the newspaper, one can also note the obvious, now illegal, racial bias in the job description—the writer had to be black.

^{lxxii} From Herbert T. Pratt's personal papers.

^{lxxiii} Munsey Hodges was sheriff of Rockingham County for five years, from 1946 to 1951. A fire at the Spray Courthouse and city jail occurred on March 17, 1950 in which six prisoners—five men and one woman—lost their lives. This tragedy ruined his career as sheriff. Munsey Hodges was personally sued for the wrongful deaths of these inmates, and as there was no insurance for such events in those days, he was held personally liable for \$25,000 to the victims' families, which he paid. He ran for re-election for sheriff and barely won, and a rematch was called. Munsey could not afford to re-run his campaign, and stepped aside. In 1951 he was appointed the acting postmaster of the Leaksville

Post Office for one year, then the county tax appraiser until 1954. Personal communication with Bob Vernon, a successor to Munsey Hodges at the sheriff's department, 2004.

"Five Men, Woman Suffocate in Jail at Spray," The Advisor, December, 1958. (A retrospective article.)

"Grand Jury Rules No One to Blame in Accidental Death of Six at Spray Jail," The Leaksville News, March 23, 1950.

"Mattresses in Spray Jail Being Made Fire Resistant; Safety Measures Adopted," The Leaksville News, March 30, 1950.

"Ex-Sheriff Dies at 68; Rites Set," Greensboro Daily News, August 8, 1962.

^{lxxiv} Two friends and a former pastor all expressed great surprise, even disbelief, that these events had occurred. They are not named to protect their privacy.

^{lxxv} Jay, Peter A. "Trail of Abductions, Murders, Rape Lead to Capture of Outlaw," The Washington Post, July 17, 1968.

^{lxxvi} "The 'Outlaw' Apprehended," Greensboro Daily News, July 18, 1968.

^{lxxvii} The following articles were the sources for the story of Edward Thompson in 1968, listed in chronological order:

"Eden Fugitive Wanted in Rape, Kidnapping Case," The Eden News, June 26, 1968.

Schlosser, Jim. "Search for Fugitive Continues; FBI Join in Wide-Scale Manhunt," The Eden News, July 3, 1968.

"FBI Joins Search for Man Charged with Kidnap, Rape," Greensboro Daily News, July 3, 1968.

"Outlaw's Car Found in Yadkin County," The Eden News, July 10, 1968.

"Eden is Combed for Outlaw," The Greensboro Record, July 16, 1968.

Irons, Ken. "Tight Security Surrounds Outlaw," The Greensboro Record, July 17, 1968.

Jay, Peter A. "Trail of Abductions, Murders, Rape Lead to Capture of Outlaw," The Washington Post, July 17, 1968.

Schlosser, Jim. "Outlaw Jailed Often," The Greensboro Record, July 17, 1968.

Trantham, Doug. "Eden Fugitive Apprehended," The Eden News, July 17, 1968.

Kaiser, Robert G. "Police Retrace Outlaw's 28-Hour Trail of Terror," The Washington Post, July 18, 1968.

"Outlaw's Hearing Planned," The Greensboro Record, July 18, 1968.

Paul, C. A. "Without a Gun, 'Like a Kitten; He's Been in Trouble Most of His Life,'" Greensboro Daily News, July 18, 1968.

Pollack, Kent. "Thompson is Moved to Buncombe Jail," Greensboro Daily News, July 18, 1968.

Schlosser, Jim, "Ex-Lawman Claims Tip," The Greensboro Record, July 18, 1968. The 'Outlaw' Apprehended," Greensboro Daily News, July 18, 1968.

"Attorney Is Selected for Outlaw's Defense," The Greensboro Record, July 19, 1968.

Irons, Ken. "Luck, Precision Factors," The Greensboro Record, July 19, 1968.

"Va. Urges Fast Trial of Outlaw," The Washington Post, July 20, 1968.

Sullivan, Nick, "Axsom Denies Men Muffed Chance to Nab Eden Fugitive," The Eden News, July 24, 1968.

"Thompson Now in Raleigh Hospital for Mental Tests," The Eden News, July 24, 1968.

Trantham, Doug. "Flight to Avoid Justice is Story of Outlaw's Life," The Eden News, July 24, 1968.

"Thompson Will Have Hearing Here Friday," The Leaksville News, September 18, 1947.

^{lxxviii} Information obtained from the death certificate, obtained by request from the N. C. Bureau of Records.

Acknowledgements: This article could not have been accomplished without the sound advice and information I received from Herbert T. Pratt, who has been the perfect source: a historian who remembers the events—and my dad. My friend Eric Ries volunteered to be my editor, and his contributions are invaluable. I also want to thank Carl Thompson, Wink Hoover, The Honorable J. Mark Pegram, Pamela Robertson, Bob Carter, Mary Pratt, Warren Pratt, Martha Jane Wilkinson, Phil Link, Bob Vernon, Lillie Ramsey, Cornelia Pike, Beverly Robertson, Jess Moore, Ann Williams, Custis Clifton, Colleen Shropshire, Ray Turner, Hazel Estes, Emma Joyce, Jack Hetzel, Dennis Maneri, Bryan Brown, Jane Hetzel, and especially my husband Steve Hetzel and our son, Reid Hetzel, all of whom informed me or inspired me to commit this story to paper.

Please visit www.AMurderBeforeEden.com

**Misc. Abstracts from
THE WEEKLY REVIEW
Newspaper**

Reidsville, Rockingham County, North Carolina

Transcribed by Julie Hampton Ganis <julieganis@yahoo.com>

Wednesday, March 13, 1889

-The wife of Mr. William **HAWKINS**, of Stokes county, committed suicide by hanging herself last week. Supposed to have some mental trouble.

Wednesday, March 20, 1889

-The community of Stoneville was much shocked by the sudden death of Mrs. **GALLIHER**. Her son had just asked her how she felt. She answered, "very well," and in fifteen minutes was a corpse.

Wednesday, March 20, 1889

-Maj. Duncan G. **McRAE** died a few days ago at Fayetteville in his 80th year. He was one of the leading men of this State.

Wednesday, March 20, 1889

-There is sickness in Mr. John **HALL'S** family. Membranous croup among his children one of them said to be quite sick.

Later – One of his children died and was buried today. Our sincere sympathies are tendered the bereaved parents.

Wednesday, March 27, 1889

-There were two jail escapes in the state the past week. Three prisoners escaped from the jail at Monroe and also three at Shelby. In the first instance they burned a hole through the floor and in the second forced open the doors.

Wednesday, March 27, 1889

-Mr. A. W. **ROBERTSON**, one of the oldest and most respected citizens in the county, died near Pine Hall, Sunday, 17th.

Wednesday, March 27, 1889

-Mrs. Rebecca **MERRITT**, a most excellent christian lady, died recently at her home in Milton, aged in the seventies.

Wednesday, March 27, 1889

-Washington **ERWIN** died in his buggy while driving along the road in Stokes county and the horse carried him home.

Wednesday, March 27, 1889

-The wife of Mr. Thomas **HALL**, formerly a citizen here died at her home in Winston Monday evening. She was a sister of Mr. John A. **INGRAM** of this town, who left for her bedside Monday morning.

Wednesday, March 27, 1889

-Died at her home in Reidsville, N.C., on Thursday morning, March 21, 1889, Mrs. Augusta **STEVENSON EVANS**, the wife of Capt. T. C. **EVANS**, in the 46th year of her age.

This estimable lady had been in declining health for some time, but was not confined to her bed until two weeks before her death. She was the daughter of Mr. James C. **STEVENSON**, of Newbern, N.C., and the mother of eight living children, two of whom are married. Mrs. **EVANS** was a lady of refined tastes and sensibilities, and possessed a tenderness of feeling, and an appreciation of the beautiful, seldom surpassed by any one. She was a faithful and devoted wife, a loving and self sacrificing mother, a kind neighbor and a sympathizing friend. She was an humble and devoted christian and for many years a consistent member of the Presbyterian church. Her dying hours presented a beautiful and sublime scene of faith in Christ triumphant over death. She was calm, submissive and confident, and spent her last breath in exhorting her family to live for the Glory of God, and to meet her in heaven. She also designated the Scripture upon which she founded her hope (Jno. II:25), and the hymns and tunes to be used by her pastor at her funeral. A large concourse of friends assembled

at the church and followed the remains to their last resting place, and mingled their sympathies and tears with the sadly bereaved husband and children.

May the God of all grace and comfort sustain them in their great loss, but her eternal gain. "Servant of Christ, well done! Praised be thy new employ! And while eternal ages run. Rest in thy Savior's joy."
Pastor.

Wednesday, April 3, 1889

-Rockingham: James **PRICE'S** little child was burned to death at Stoneville – its clothes caught from fire in the new grounds.

-*Leaksville Gazette* – At the cotton mills Sallie **OBEY** died of pneumonia on the 14th of March.

-At Cox's barroom near Leaksville, James Robert **SMITH** drank eight bottles of beer and died before he reached home.

-Madison Notes – Mr. Robert **SMITH**, of Stoneville, is dead. Truly a dreadful warning to those who are following in his footsteps.

Wednesday, April 10, 1889

-Col. John E. **WOODING**, a native of Halifax county, Va., but who had for at least thirty years made his home in Milton, died quietly at the home of his son, Mr. R. S. **WOODING**, last Friday evening at the age of seventy-nine years. Col. **WOODING** was a quite remarkable man, he possessed a fine intellect, had an almost perfect memory, kept well posted on all topics of current interest, was well read, and we think one of the most interesting conversationalists to whom we ever listened.

Wednesday, April 17, 1889

-Mr. Romulus S. **CRADDOCK** died near Stoneville on the 8th inst.
Leaksville Gazette.

-A brief mention was made on Saturday evening of the sudden death of Rev. Wm. **TURNER**, an aged and honored citizen of Salem. It seems that Mr. **TURNER** accompanied by his wife had driven out to new Friendship

church on Saturday where he expected to preach a sermon, but owing to the fact that there was a severe fire raging in the woods near by, it was thought best to dismiss his congregation so that they might protect their fences and farm houses. Mr. **TURNER** and his wife then started home, he dying on the way, as stated Saturday. *Sentinel*.

-Mrs. Phil L. **GRASTY**, in Danville, Va., was found dead in her house kneeling at her bedside. An empty bottle of chloral was near. It is believed she had taken by mistake an overdose to induce sleep.

-The death of Mrs. **GROGAN** last week was inadvertently overlooked by *The Review* of that date. She died of consumption and was well advanced in life. Mrs. **GROGAN** was a widow indeed, her hands were given to toil for her daily bread, and her honest virtues won her many friends in our midst. As she bore the cross in this life, she wears the crown in the life beyond.

-Mrs. Bishop **LYMAN** died in Raleigh last Saturday night.

-One of Caswell's leading citizens, T.J. **WOMACK**, Esq., died Sunday after a short illness and was buried Monday afternoon.

-Madison: Mr. Jack **SMITH'S** little child died of whooping cough last week near Ayersville, N.C. John **SMITH** and Abe **PIKE** had a difficulty over a game of cards in which **SMITH** cut **PIKE** with a razor from the effects of which he died. Both resided near Sandy Ridge, Stokes county. John **SMITH** made his escape.

Wednesday, April 24, 1889

-Died, this morning, at about 7 o'clock, Mr. J. W. **BAILEY**, aged about 29 years. He leaves a wife and three children. He has four brothers, two of whom reside at this place. Mr. **BAILEY** has been serving efficiently for the past two years as general manager in the tobacco manufacturing establishment of the Messrs. **BAILEY** Bros. *Twin City Daily*.

-Two strange deaths occurred recently, - one near Yadkinville and the other in Davie county. Two orphan sisters, named **REAVIS**, were taken with something like chills on the same day. One died in 13 hours and the other in 36 hours. *Sentinel*.

-It is said that a Mr. **PRITCHARD** who had heart disease, while fishing at High Rock, a fishing resort in this county, pulled up a very large pike and such was his joy and excitement at getting it ashore that he fell back on the bank and died from the effects of it.

Wednesday, May 1, 1889

-Mrs. Elizabeth **WILSON**, until sixteen months ago owner of the famous Cleveland Springs, died at her home three miles from Shelby from old age. She was in her ninetieth year. She leaves property valued at \$60,000.

-Mrs. Mary **SMITH**, relict of the late Richard I. **SMITH**, died yesterday morning at her home, near Osmond, N.C. She had been in quite feeble health for a long while and her death was not at all unexpected. Mrs. **SMITH** was about seventy-three years old, and had from childhood lived a most consecrated christian life. *Milton Advertiser*.

-The giant of Virginia, George **HOOVER**, of Rockingham county, is dead. He was over six feet and weighed 500 pounds.

-Scott **BAILEY**, colored, was lynched at midnight Monday, at Halifax Court House, Va., for an attempt to outrage a young lady of the village, in broad daylight.

-Drowned in a tub. *Asheville Citizen*: The many friends of Mr. and Mrs. J. D. **BREVARD** were shocked to learn of the drowning of the latter's little son in a tub of water at his parents home early yesterday morning. It seems that the little fellow, who was only about three years of age, fell into the tub headforemost, and was drowned instantly.

-Mr. Rufus H. **SMITH**, who has been in delicate health for two or three years, peacefully expired Monday morning at 3 o'clock, after having languished upon his bed for weeks. He was conscious to the point of dissolution, and entered the valley of the shadow in a euthanasia. A few moments before expiring he turned over in his bed and gazed wistfully into the face of his aged mother, and the scene of that last earthly recognition between them is said to have been very affecting. The cause of Mr. **SMITH'S** disease was consumption. He was upwards of 30 years old, and leaves a wife and children. His remains were deposited in the

town cemetery yesterday with fitting obsequies. The deceased's brother, Mr. Jno. A. **SMITH**, of Blackstone Va., was in attendance at the funeral.

-In the Durham ~~Sun~~ of last Wednesday we find an account of the finding of the body of Robert **BURTON**, who fell out of a boat and was drowned while fishing in Freeman's pond, near Durham, on the 20th....

Wednesday, May 8, 1889

-Dr. John B. **HANKS**, the leading physician in Chatham county, is dead, aged 73. He was an excellent man.

-Mrs. Rebecca **FURMAN**, the mother of Capt. Robert M. **FURMAN**, died recently in Asheville, aged 71 years. Capt. **FURMAN** has our sympathy – he was a good son and lost an excellent mother.

-Abe **PIKE** who was cut by John **SMITH**, is not dead. *Germanton Times*.

-Mr. Willis **SMITH**, who died near Cole's Store Wednesday, April 24th, had 30 grand-children and 39 great grand-children all living at the time of his death. *Hillsboro Observer*.

-Capt. **WILLIAMS**, who was at the wheel of the Merrimac during its encounter with the *Monitor* in 1862, died recently in Norfolk, aged 72 years.

-Mrs. J. W. **HADEN**, of Lexington, N.C., died recently from the effects of poison administered by Dr. J. J. **SUMMERRILL** of Salisbury. He gave her morphine, supposing it to be quinine.

-Dr. John A. **HANKS**, one of the most eminent physicians who has ever practiced medicine in Chatham county, died in the 77th year of his age. Owing to the steady decline of his health, Dr. **HANKS** has been unable to practice his profession for the last ten years, still he will be greatly missed by his many warm friends, who loved him for his many most excellent traits of character.

Wednesday, May 15, 1889

-The *Danville Times* records the death of Mrs. Thos. **BAYNES** in Caswell, N.C.

-Mrs. Robert **HANCOCK**, one of the oldest residents of Newberne (sic), is dead, aged 70--- she was one of the good old time ladies.

-John **ADAMS** in Wilkes county, killed himself one day, and his wife died from the shock the next. Such wives must have more heart than head.

-The *Raleigh Call* says "Mr. Calvin E. **GRIER**, of Charlotte is dead." In this day of multitudinous Captains and Colonels and Brigadier Generals if ever a man deserved the rank of Captain that he fairly won in the late war, Capt. Calvin E. **GRIER** was that man. He died from his old wounds.

-Mrs. J. H. **HAMPTON** left yesterday to visit her former home at Alamo, Tenn. She will remain away about a month. *Leaksville Gazette*.

-An old negro was in town the other day with a Confederate captain's uniform on, which he had been wearing as a Sunday suit for 20 years. *Burlington News*.

-Mrs. T. Y. **BAYNES**, of Bush Harbor, Caswell county, N.C., died suddenly at her home on Monday, the 6th inst. She was afflicted with heart dropsy. She was an excellent christian lady and was greatly loved by her neighbors, all of whom sincerely regret her loss. She leaves a husband and five children.

-Mrs. **GOODE**, the wife of our townsman, Mr. G. M. **GOODE**, died about midnight Saturday. She had been an invalid for months and her most hopeful friends did not expect her recovery. Her remains were interred in the town cemetery Sunday afternoon. A large concourse of people followed them to their last resting place, Ministers **WRIGHT** and **McCULLEN** conducted the funeral ceremonies. The deceased was not a member of any church, but had expressed her hope in Christ. She was greatly beloved by all who knew her. She leaves a husband, father and sister to mourn their bereavement, and an infant child.

-Mrs. Martha **FITZ**, the relict of Geo. **FITZ**, at Bush Harbor, Caswell county, N.C., took her life at her home on Saturday, the 4th inst., about 3

o'clock in the afternoon. She had arranged all of her household matters for the day, and when she had finished went to the trunk of Mr. **DABBS**, who works on her farm, and secured a Smith & Wesson pistol, which she took and placing at her head fired, the ball entering her temple, killing her instantly. No one was present at the time. Mrs. **FITZ** was supposed to have been very much troubled over the death of her husband, who died last June, and the loss of her property, to which cause is attributed her self destruction. She was about 50 years of age, the mother of two children, and was highly respected in her community.

Wednesday, May 22, 1889

-Col. Geo. R. **QUINCY**, the landlord of the Exchange, spent two days in Warren last week with his father, who is quite ill.

-Later. — We are pained to chronicle the death of Mr. **QUINCY**, who died Friday at his home in Warren... He made many friends while here...

Wednesday, May 29, 1889

-Dr. J. H. **THACKER** has located in Leaksville.

Wednesday, June 5, 1889

-The storm blew at Danville that blew down J.G. **PENN'S** large tobacco factory, almost complete, and killed under its ruins thirteen of the workmen, was a dire calamity...

-Our sympathies are with Mr. and Mrs. J. H. **BRANNOCK**, in the death of their infant child, which occurred Saturday afternoon.

-Married, by Rev. R. P. **TROY** at Carmel church, this county, on Sunday, June 2nd, Charlie **ANDERSON** to Miss Lula **ANDERSON**, all of this county.

-Death of our oldest citizen. Died, at his home in this city, Monday night at 9 o'clock, Mr. Wm. **LINDSEY**, Sr., in the 59th year of his age. Mr. **LINDSEY**, as stated before in THE REVIEW, had been in Richmond receiving treatment at the hands of Dr. **McGUIRE**. Becoming suddenly worse and realizing that his case was worse he asked to be brought home

that he might die. On the road he was paralyzed and when he arrived here last Wednesday morning he was in a helpless condition. He was removed to his home here and has never rallied. Mr. **LINDSEY'S** death is a loss to our community. He was one of our wealthiest and most influential residents. The funeral took place yesterday at 3:30 from his residence. His remains were deposited in the family cemetery at the rear of the Baptist church.

Wednesday, June 12, 1889

-Mr. **PRUITT**, formerly of this place, was killed by the falling factory in Danville.

-Mr. R. R. **RODENHIZER**, until recently a citizen of this place, died suddenly of paralysis in Danville last Thursday, May 30.

-The commissioners and magistrates appropriated a sum not exceeding \$5,000 to build a bridge across Smith river at a point not distant from present dangerous ford near the cotton mills.

-A sad death occurred in Danville Friday, namely, that of Miss Bertha **MAYS...**

-We are sorry to announce the sudden death of Mrs. Val **ALLEN** at Douglass, this county.

-On Friday the 21st inst., the races which will take place on the racetrack of Mr. Jas. **BETHELL**, in the Meadows, will attract much attention. A large crowd is expected to attend, and a good delegation from Reidsville will be present. Mr. **BETHELL** has the largest stock farm in this section of the country. Some of his best stock will be in the races. Trains run up to "Meadow View" in the morning from Danville and return in the evening.

-Mrs. **BRUTON** continues very ill. She has typhoid fever.

Wednesday, June 19, 1889

-Rev. Jno. H. **PATTERSON** died at home in North Danville, Saturday. He has been dying, we may say, for years, gradually wasting away with that fell disease, called consumption.

-Mr. J. D. **WILDER**, who used to live in Danville, died in Greensboro, Monday...

-At Milton, the other day George **LAWSON**, a well known old colored man about the town, died in the country...[lengthy article]

Wednesday, June 26, 1889

-B. Y. **McADEN**, popularly known as Bart, died recently at Lowell, S.C. He was aged 60, was a native of Caswell, N.C., and served as Lieutenant the first and second years of the war in the 13th N.C. Regiment.

-The bridge over Dan river at Madison has been completed, save the covering and weatherboarding, and the C.F. & Y.V. trains now run into Madison. The bridge is 40 high and 285 feet long.

-Col. D. F. **JOHNSON**, a native of Caswell county, N.C., died at his home in Madison, Ga., on the 16th inst. He was a brother of Mrs. W. N. **SHELTON** and father of Mrs. James G. **PENN** of this city [Danville].

-Mrs. Priscilla **JONES** died in Yanceyville a few days since, aged 72. She was a noble woman, the widow of Dr. **JONES**, who was a prominent physician at Milton for long years.

-Killed by the Train. Mr. Abram **JACKSON**, a worthy man, about 60 years of age, who lives in the northern end of town, was killed by the southern bound train as it was coming into town Friday about 8 a.m. He had been plowing and had gone to the house to get a drink of water. Hearing the approaching train and wishing to secure his horse, he ran out and tried to cross the track in front of the engine to his field on the other side. The engine was too close upon him, and as he jumped the boiler struck him in the side, knocking him down. His arm was broken. Dr. **BROUGHTON** was summoned in great haste, but could give the unfortunate man no relief, and after lingering for about an hour in the most

acute agony he died. He leaves a large family, who will deplore his death all the more, coming as it did from such a horrible accident.

-Racing at Meadow View. The races at Meadow View, which *THE REVIEW* announced in its last issue to take place on last Friday, were voted a decided success by the large crowd present. The reporter says the number which attended from Reidsville can be estimated at a hundred. Equally as many went from Danville and the crowd numbered about six hundred.

Meadow View, the home of Mr. J. W. **BETHELL**, is one of the fairest and most fertile farms lying on the banks of the Dan. The scenery in every direction is of surpassing grandeur. Mr. **BETHELL'S** residence is as handsome a country villa as may be met in a day's journey... we would like to say that the soul of the beautiful mansion is Mr. **BETHELL'S** charming wife.

The races commenced promptly after the Danville train arrived... It was a beautiful race and much enthusiasm was manifested... [lengthy article]

-A Brilliant Affair. After the races Friday afternoon at Meadow View farm, a party of young people were invited by Mr. Sam **HAIRSTON** to attend a ball at his mother's home at Oak Hill in Virginia, distant from Meadow View farm about 8 or 9 miles. Oak Hill is one of the most beautiful and aristocratic looking country places in the Piedmont section, situated on a high bluff just above the Dan River, the hill is beautifully terraced down to the water's edge. The affair was one of the most brilliant, as well as enjoyable, occasions ever seen in old Va. There were 15 to 20 couples present. At 10:30 o'clock the table was spread with a supper that would tempt the appetite of the most fastidious. It is needless to say that every one did full justice to the supper after spending the entire day at the race track. Dancing lasted until past the wee small hours of night and those from Reidsville after dancing was over came direct home without retiring. Arriving here at about nine o'clock a.m., though very much fatigued, all voted the occasion one of the rarest pleasure.

Wednesday, July 3, 1889

-Mr. Julius B. **WARREN** died at his home in Caswell county last Saturday.

-In Memoriam: Ross R. **IHRIE**, M.D., son of Gen. Peter **IHRIE**, was born at Easton, Pa., March 24th, 1828, and died at Pittsboro, N.C., June 28th, 1889... Though born and reared in Pennsylvania, at the breaking out of the war, he entered it with the first, and was soon promoted to the Lieutenant Colonelcy of the 15th N.C. Troops...

-On the **GRAVES** plantation in Caswell, N.C., are the marks and remains of an Indian village. The Yanceyville paper says a dark strip through the field shows where the wigwams stood.

-Rockingham: Mrs. **GAMBRELL** and Miss **PHILLIPS** returned to Maryland last Tuesday, where they will spend several weeks. Miss Annie L. **SMITH** and Prof. N. S. **SMITH** attended the Teacher's Assembly at Morehead city last week. We learn that an infant child of Mr. F. D. **SWANN** was severely scalded in Danville last Saturday by falling into a tub of hot water. Mr. **SWANN** was summoned home by a telegram, and the unfortunate little sufferer has since died.

-The brick block of Messrs. J. B. & J. I. **JOHNSTON**, on West Market street is nearly completed. The hall on the second floor is to be used as the colored Masonic hall. Messrs. **JOHNSTON** have had electric lights put in.

-Mr. J. W. **GUERRANT**, so well known in Rockingham, is still with the Exchange Warehouse, of Danville, and is whooping up the tobacco for his friends. The exchange claims to be the banner warehouse on averages. See ad. in this issue.

-On the ninth our boys will attend the military encampment at Wrightsville. We venture to say that no two companies there will present a better appearance than the Reidsville companies. The Reidsville Light Infantry are to have a brand spanking new uniform to wear on the occasion.

-Monday evening about 5 o'clock in a colored barroom near the electric light house Jim **HENDERSON** and Sallie **McCAIN** engaged in quite a battle, in which the latter was very badly used up. **HENDERSON** was taken before Mayor **WATT**, who bound him over to the next term of court in the sum of \$75.

-Mr. W. R. **GUERRANT**, the popular young hardware merchant, formerly of Leaksville, is now living in Danville with that splendid hardware house. Messrs. B. S. **CREWS & Bro.** Mr. **GUERRANT** will be glad to have his friends call on him there when they come to Danville. See ad. of B. S. **CREWS & Bro.**

-Mrs. Sallie E. **PARRISH** has purchased the interest of Mr. J. H. **HAMLIN** in the dry goods establishment of **BARNES & HAMLIN**. The new name of the firm is that of S. E. **PARRISH & Co.** Mr. **HAMLIN** will remain with the house till Sept. He will then embark in some new business. The dry goods business will be conducted about the same as before by the new firm.

-At a meeting of the stock holders of the Reidsville cotton mills yesterday, the last installment on stock was paid in, and the following persons were elected as board of directors, viz: Mr. **GAMBRILL**, H. K. **REID**, J. S. **WADLINGTON**, A. J. **BOYD**, S. C. **PENN**, Dr. J. H. **REDD** and Dr. T. E. **BALSLEY**.

-Mr. **SLOAN'S** residence on Main street is completed. The carpenter's work was superintended by Mr. Nascar **LONGEST**. The painting was executed by Messrs. **COLLINS & HUFFINES**, and is one of the best jobs ever seen in this section...

-The competitive drill the other night at the armory of the Reidsville Rifles was a very interesting one. Quite a number of spectators were present. The contest was very close, but finally narrowed down between Mr. Willie **WAYT** and Mr. Wooster **FERRELL**. It was a long while before the judges could tell who was entitled to the medal, but it was finally awarded to Mr. **FERRELL** and presented by Mr. J. R. **WEBSTER** in an appropriate little speech. The boys never looked better and received continued applause from the audience.

-It will pay you whenever in Danville to go see the mammoth **LEE'S** tobacco warehouse...Mr. Jno. W. **SMITH**, formerly of this county and so well and widely known to the farmers of this section, is with this house and looks especially after the interest of the farmers...

-Death of an Aged Lady. Mrs. Lucy **WILES**, who lived about four miles from town, died on Wednesday morning, the 26th inst., and was buried at

Speedwell church. A large crowd attended the funeral services, which were conducted by Rev. Mr. **CRAIG**, of Reidsville. Mrs. **WILES** was born in Halifax county, Va., and her maiden name was Lucy **REYNOLDS**. She was born Oct. 10, 1793, and was therefore nearly 96 years old at the time of her death. She was quite young when she married and came with her husband to the place where she died, and where they record a large family of children. She professed faith in Christ in 1818, but did not join the church until Dec. 4, 1884, when she was baptized by Mr. **CRAIG** and received into the Presbyterian church. She was a remarkable woman, both on account of her great age and deep piety. She was blind, but her mind was vigorous to the last, and it was deeply interesting to hear her talk of "old times," and to see her abiding faith in Christ and his promises, as she waited with heavenly patience to be taken home. She has entered that "rest that remaineth for the people of God."

-Married on the 16th inst., near Prestonville, Stokes county, Miss Carrie **FOY**, late of Reidsville, and Mr. T. J. **GANN**, of Stokes, Rev. Joseph **JOYCE** officiating. Also at Ayersville, Miss Deska **MARTIN** and Mr. Andrew **THORNTON**.

-We regret to announce the death of Mr. Marion **AMOS**' little child. It died on Friday last also Mr. Joe **JOYCE**'S child, aged 1 year, which died the 18th inst.

-At last Madison has the long looked for train in town. Hurrah! for old Madison. She will get there yet.

-We are sorry to learn of the death of Mr. Newt **MARTIN**'S little child, which occurred last Tuesday night, near Buffalo church, Stokes county.

-We had a short and pleasant visit on Saturday last from Mr. Will **DARLINGTON**, son of Mr. J. T. **DARLINGTON**, editor of the Leaksville Gazette. Mr. **DARLINGTON** was on his way home from Abbeville, S.C., where he has been attending school.

-Mr. B. M. **WALKER** has connected himself with the Star Warehouse for a longer term...

ROCKINGHAM COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Rockingham County Historical Society was organized in 1954 in the efforts to preserve a portion of our County's fading history. Among the benefits of membership are the mailings consisting of the quarterly newsletter, which contains news items and short articles on local history and genealogy and genealogical queries from members; *The Journal of Rockingham County History and Genealogy*, published once a year. The Journal contains in-depth articles on local history as well as abstracts of original documents. The Society is now restoring Wright Tavern in Wentworth which serves as our headquarters. Our office is on East Main Street (NC 65) across the street from the County Courthouse in Wentworth. Our office phone number is (336) 342-5901. We encourage you to participate in all of the Society's numerous activities!

JOIN TODAY!

Fill out the personal information below, check type of membership desired below, and mail with payment to the address at the bottom of the page.

Name _____

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I wish the following class of membership in the **Rockingham County Historical Society, Inc.** All memberships are annual except the Life Membership, which is permanent. Student members will not receive the society journal. All annual memberships run with the calendar year, January – December.

Please complete the personal information on the reverse side and check type of membership desired:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Student \$ 2.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor \$ 40.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$20.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Donor \$ 75.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family \$25.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron \$150.00 |
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I am enclosing a contribution to Wright Tavern Restoration in memory of _____

All contributions over \$15.00 (Journal subscription cost) are tax deductible.

Rockingham County Historical Society, Inc.

PO Box 84

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Rockingham County Historical Society, Inc.

2007 – 2008

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